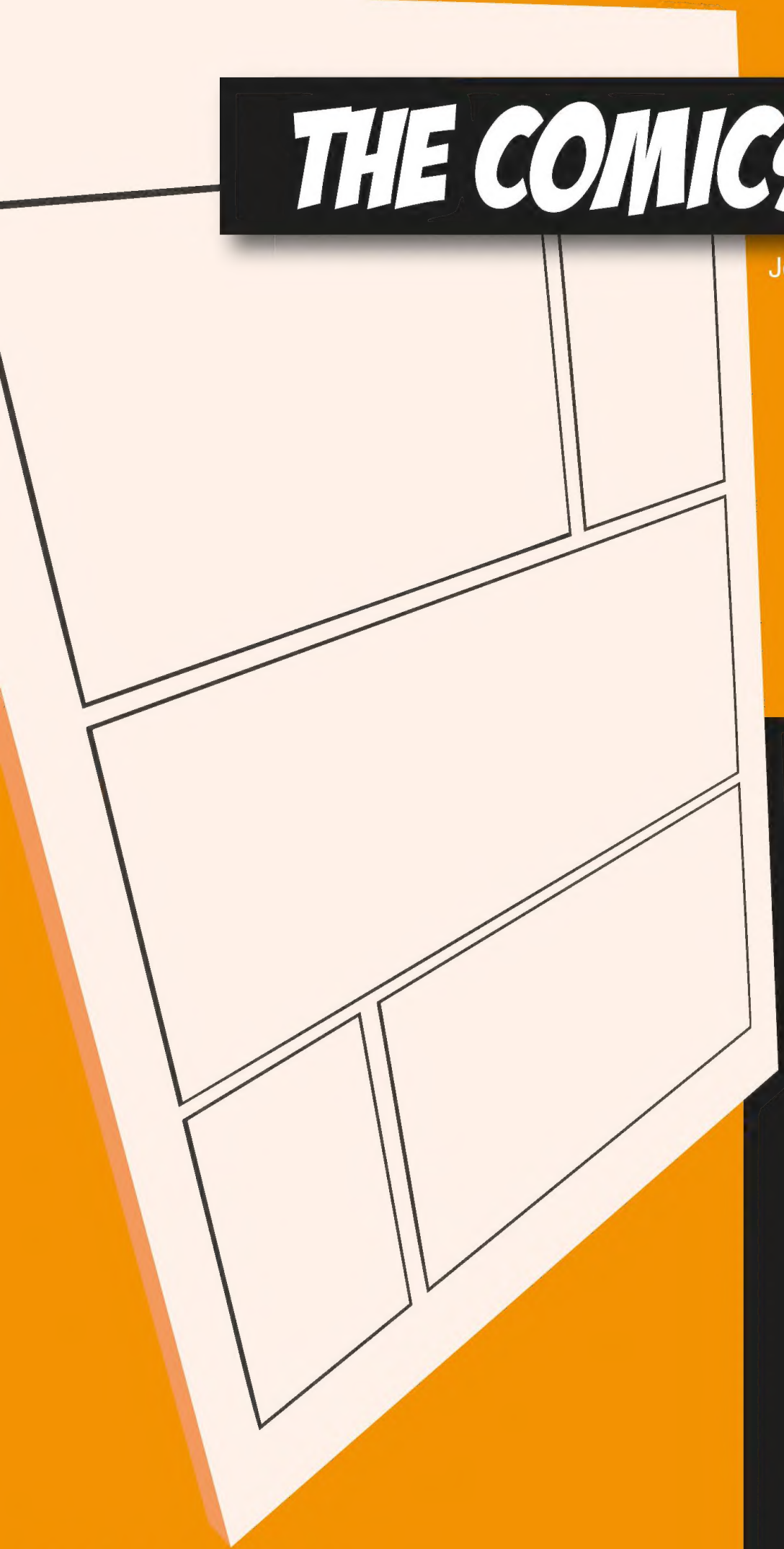
THE COMICS GRID

Journal of Comics Scholarship

Year One



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Between January 2011 to January 2012, *The Comics Grid*'s editorial board included Roberto Bartual, Esther Claudio, Kathleen Dunley, Michael Hill, Antonio Venezia, Ernesto Priego and Greice Schneider.

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Foreword. Year One

by Ernesto Priego

This is a compilation of most of the material published on *The Comics Grid, Journal of Comics Scholarship* between 31 January 2011 and 30 January 2012.

This collection is by definition a "reassembly" (Groensteen, *System of Comics*, 25) of media-specific writings that were published periodically on the more fluid medium of a Wordpress-based web journal. Please bear in mind it is the result of an editorial project that developed collectively and throughout time. The images reproduced here were meant to be seen online, not printed, so their resolution, should you read this on paper, leave much to be desired. Nevertheless, we are hoping that by collecting a year's worth of collective work in a different, more fixed format these writings may find a new audience, or even be re-read differently.

I conceived *The Comics Grid* in close collaboration with my peers Roberto Bartual (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid), Esther Claudio (Universidad Complutense de Madrid), Greice Schneider (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven) and Tony Venezia (Birkbeck College, London) in discussions during conferences in London, Manchester, Copenhagen and Leeds. The idea was to develop an international network of comics scholars in order to foster collaboration; it quickly took shape as a peer-edited open access academic journal dedicated to comics scholarship focused on online reading and rapid publication.

We believe that online, open access, rapid scholarly publication offers great potential to maximise academic research and pedagogical impact. All the contributions included here, including those by members of the editorial board, were collectively reviewed, edited and discussed by academic peers prior to publication. The material reflects the initial ice-breaking impetus of a small group, and gradually it reveals the inclusion of new authors.

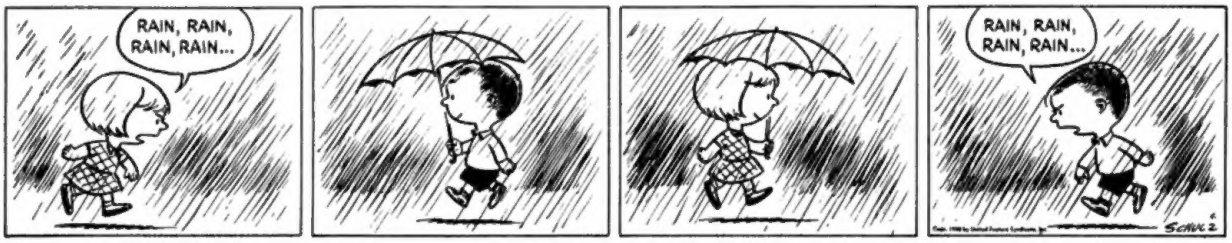
When we set up the journal we made it clear we wanted it to function as an online laboratory where different critical approaches to comics were publicly and collectively put to test. This in fact what happened, at least behind the scenes and "under the hood" of the Wordpress dashboard, but hopefully it will also come to the fore when reading the material on this new shape and platform.

I am indebted to Lucy Morris, Nicolas Labarre, Brad Brooks and Adam Hyde for their help throughout the editorial process. I would also like to thank all contributors, editors and reviewers for their hard work, and to all our readers for their ongoing support.

See you online!

Peanuts, 5 October 1950

By Roberto Bartual



Schulz, C. M. (1950) *Peanuts* (5 October)

Before writing *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, somebody should have told Bergson that one of the best ways to kill humour is trying to explain why a gag is funny. However, from the point of view of the comic-strip artist it is sometimes useful to understand why some things make us laugh more than others. Take this Peanuts strip, actually the fourth Charles Schulz drew. It's a rainy day and Patty forgot her umbrella at home. She crosses her path with Shermy and "borrows" an umbrella from him. We should admit there's nothing funny about the situation. We could even say it's a good deal misogynistic by today's standards. And yet, it's one of the most hilarious strips Schulz published. We can find in this strip a classic instance of what Benoît Peeters called a "phantom panel": an action that is not represented but is implied by the concatenation of two panels; that is, the elision of an image followed by an invitation to recreate that image in your mind (Peeters, 1998: 40). In order to explain this concept, Peeters uses a sequence from Tintin in Tibet that speaks for itself:

That's lucky. I can just see enough to get up the gangway...
AIR INDIA
Captain, stop! Not there! Here! The other steps!
And when I've finished, I'll see what's in your eye.

Hergé (1960) *Tintin in Tibet* (Paris: Casterman, p.9)

When we see the air hostess sticking plasters in Captain Haddock's face, we understand in that exact moment he fell to the ground while Tintin was shouting at him, which is far more ingenious

than actually showing the fall. The comic effect is based on metonymy: instead of showing the cause of the action (the fall), Hergé shows the effect of the action (the bruises on Haddock's face). The reader completes the sequence by means of a simple deduction.

Schulz uses a variant of this technique, ten years before *Tintin in Tibet*. But what makes Schulz strip especially funny is that he complicates the process of deduction by delaying it. Our understanding of the sequence is not as immediate as Herge's. In the third panel we see Patty with the umbrella, which is the equivalent of Captain Haddock being attended by the airhostess, but when we see Patty's image we are left with the question: "why does Patty suddenly have an umbrella?" This question lingers in our mind until we read the last panel. Schulz had the ability to make the reader pose that question and then spend some time (maybe a second or a fraction of a second) to imagine the answer before being given the solution in the last panel. Delay becomes a means of creating mystery. Mystery becomes an invitation to use imagination. And what's humor without mystery and imagination?

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Ergodic texts: *In the Shadow of No Towers*

By Esther Claudio

Spiegelman, A. (2004) *In the Shadow of No Towers* (New York: Pantheon Books)

Non-linear reading is a form of interaction with the text which has become increasingly common thanks to the Internet. It is not a new way of reading – the *I-Ching*, the inscriptions in Ancient Egypt or Guillaume Apollinaire's *Calligrames* offer a kind of interaction where the reader is not forced to follow only one way previously set by the author but he/she can choose the most convenient path, jumping from one text to the other.

In comics, arguably the most common instance may be Chris Ware's works, whose labyrinthine diagrams plunge the reader into a whirlpool of multiple itineraries that depict the complexity of his characters' feelings and personal stories. Non-linear narrative makes it possible to juxtapose and combine events and to highlight the interconnection between them as well as to create a comprehensive picture of a given experience. For this reason I consider that this narrative style brilliantly depicts the chaos and the fear during September 11th in Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*.

At first sight, each page is a shapeless mass of frames which is closer to a collage than to a comic. Paces multiply and there are no clear directions to read it. Take this page, for example. Where to begin? With the title? Or with the biggest panel of all, the round one, in the middle of the lower half of the page which effectively draws our attention? If we observe it and read it, the metaphor of the shoe will drive us to the old- fashioned panels which explain the origin of the "dropping the other shoe" saying. Although if we had started with the title, it would have driven our look at the top of the tower which is behind the word "Towers". In any case, no matter what path we choose. They're all interconnected.

That twisted and hanging panel behind the word "Towers" uncovers a USA flag which is also reproduced in the panel on the left. This frame is included in a group of three images under the title of "The New Normal", a short strip which serves as a comment about the repercussion of the catastrophe in North American's daily routine. The strip depicts a sleepy family in front of the television before the terrorist attack, then terrified in the next panel, when it takes place, and sleepy again after the attack. That is to say, the result of the attack, as depicted in the last panel, is a family (or citizens) affected by the tragedy, as their hairs indicate, but as anesthetized as before – as if terror was now normal. Only one thing has changed around them – the flag on the wall, which is on the one hand the symbol of the country, of the citizens' unity in face of tragedy, and on the other a symbol of the strong patriotism that the event arose. A kind of patriotism which is, sometimes, overwhelming, as Spiegelman visually portrays on the 3 central panels, where he looks astonishingly at a gigantic flag on his television at home. Underneath we can read "Logos [...] look enormous on television" – Is this the new normal? Terror? Propagandist patriotism?

The analysis of the political use of the tragedy mixes with the fear of a second attack. In a vertical strip, we read on top that Spiegelman himself "was sure [they] were going to die" and as we continue reading to the bottom the words combine with the tower collapse. The fear of a second attack seems both absurd and imminent. On the one hand, as the "etymological vaudeville" explains, waiting for

another attack would be like waiting for the other shoe to drop, something unpleasant but nonetheless desired, as if going back to normal would be impossible until it happened.

On the other hand, the fear is powerfully vivid, more real than reality, like the photo of the "Yihad" shoe, which sharply contrasts with the rest of pictorial elements. The circular frame is an indepedent image which does not belong to any strip as the rest do, but it is part of the page itself, that is, it is part of the narration as a whole and it resumes, as a conclusion, the discourse provided therein. The non-linear reading, the jumps between panels, between strips and within the page layout, recreates the chaos of a complex and hurting situation.

Among the images, the reader travels the many paths and alleys that Spiegelman has built for him/her. A paranoid reading which consists of putting the puzzle pieces together to compose the collage of an unforgettable trauma. Among the pieces, the itineraries multiply and it is the readers who must re-create the discourse, each one of us in our own way, until the full picture of the tragedy arises.

REFERENCES

Espen J. Aarseth introduces the concept of ergodic literature in his book *Cybertext. Perspectives on ergodic literature* (1997) to refer to a text that requires non-trivial effort to be traversed. In the introduction, he mentions the examples of Apollinaire, the *I-Ching* and the Egyptian inscriptions but also other more contemporary instances like Nabokov's *Pale Fire* or Cortazar's *Rayuela (Hopscotch)*.

Spiegelman, A. (2004) *In the Shadow of No Towers* (New York: Pantheon Books)

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The Wrong Place – Brecht Evens

By Greice Schneider

Evens, B. (2010) *The Wrong Place (Ergens Waar Je Niet Wil Zijn)* (Montréal: Drawn and Quarterly) (no pagination)

The Wrong Place, by Belgian Brecht Evens, won an award in Angoulême for audacity, and it is easy to see why. The first thing that calls attention, just by glancing at the book, are Evens' loose watercolors, distancing himself from the expected emphasis on the trace and contour that prevail in comics. The surprise, though, is that *The Wrong Place* is more than just a beautiful book made by a skilful visual artist, as it is so common to find. Evens' style comes hand in hand with a happy awareness of the mechanisms of graphic storytelling, and explores the possible combinations between word and image and the reading directions on the page.

The first part of the book takes place in a party, in an apartment. This specific page reveals those common small rituals and social codes so familiar in these festive occasions, when the guests are just arriving. The only character that we can actually see is Gert – the host, and protagonist in this part of the story (and even so, the author is economic to the point of just giving us Gert's head, one hand and some contour of his back). The rest of the characters in the scene are only barely suggested: yellow and green circles indicating heads, shoes, hands, eyes, mouth. The same metonymic logic applies to the space of the apartment: if the door – as the place of arrival – gains a little more definition as it concentrates more activities, the rest of the apartment is suggested not by a delimitated space composed of floor, ceiling and walls, but by objects spread across the page (a lamp, a hi-fi and a photo frame) functioning as symbolic shortcuts for the whole.

Besides characters and scenario, the third – and most interesting – visual element that composes this page is the text. On the content level, what we have is a sample of the familiar small talk typical from these situations. The dialogues follow conversational patterns that make the flow very predictable and repetitive, with lines involving instructions on how to get to the place (Gert asks three times, with the same words "did you find it alright?"), followed by asking what the guests wish to drink, or remarks on the house decoration ("you've got the same IKEA's chairs as us") or guest's figurine ("oh, you've got the same tights as me").

The content (or lack of content) of the dialogues, is reflected in the way they are visually arranged. Here, it is not the silences that are meaningless, but precisely the need of breaking a potential uncomfortable silence and reduce the tension with any topic, even if just fillers. This purely phatic communication is translated visually, with words (more than anything else) filling blank spaces of the page. Everything that is said in this page is basically chatter to fulfill the function of initial bonding.

And this is also efficiently reproduced visually: instead of adopting a sequential order of panels, what we see are different moments developing in the same image, in the same apartment space, reproducing the same temporality and confusion existent in parties. It's true that the absence of panels compromises a sequential order of events, but this is compensated by the text, that can still be read from top to bottom, in three diagonal lines that go from the top left of the page to the bottom right. That organization obeys not only a temporal logic, but also a spatial one, going from the door – where everything begins – to the living room inside the apartment in the adjacent page, creating a sense of progression and development. In the absence of balloons, corresponding colors help to identify who's speaking.

Evens, B. (2010) *The Wrong Place (Ergens Waar Je Niet Wil Zijn)* (Montréal: Drawn and Quarterly) (no pagination) [Image annotated by the author]

These are only a few of visual solutions that make this book succeed in the task of integrating artistic skills to a larger narrative program. While it keeps the reader busy to figure out his way along the pages, offering a considerable variety of styles and reading possibilities, *The Wrong Place* avoids the temptation of gratuitous visual tricks and manages to maintain a coherent tension between showing and telling.

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Evens, B. (2010) *The Wrong Place* (Montréal: Drawn and Quarterly)

Sin Titulo, by Cameron Stewart, page 1

By Ernesto Priego

I've been having a dream...
I'm walking along a beach.
My feet sink into the sand, which is coarse and unpleasant.
Looking ahead, I can see a figure seated beneath a tree in the distance
I call out a greeting, but the person does not respond. I start to move towards the tree...
...but I seem to stay fixed in place as my body walks away.
I watch myself grow fuzzy and indistinct...
...and then I wake up.

Stewart, C. (2007) *Sin Titulo* (http://www.sintitulocomic.com/, 1)

In his *Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud (1911) cites Otto Gruppe's *Griechische Mythologie und Religionsgeschichte* (1906), where he cites and explains the classification of oneiric material made by Macrobius and Artemidorus:

> "Dreams were divided into two classes; the first class was believed to be influenced only by the present (or the past), and was unimportant in respect of the future; it included the *enuknia* (insomnia), which directly reproduce a given idea or its opposite; e.g., hunger or its satiation; and the *phantasmata*, which elaborate the given idea phantastically, as e.g. the nightmare, *ephialtes*. The second class of dreams, on the other hand, was determinative of the future. To this belonged:
> 1. Direct prophecies received in the dream (*chrematismos, oraculum*);

2. the foretelling of a future event (*orama, visio*);
3. the symbolic dream, which requires interpretation (*oneiros, somnium.*)
This theory survived for many centuries."

In turn, Freud explains that

> Dreams in general were expected to yield important solutions, but not every dream was immediately understood, and it was impossible to be sure that a certain incomprehensible dream did not really foretell something of importance, so that an effort was made to replace the incomprehensible content of the dream by something that should be at once comprehensible and significant.

There is, of course, something decidedly dream-like in the first page/screen from Cameron Stewart's webcomic *Sin Titulo* (17 June 2007). As the starting scene/moment in the narrative, a story without a name, the eight symmetrical panels are proleptic, i.e, anticipating a series of events to come. The layout is indeed a double-layered comic strip, with a greater length than height, unlike most long or medium-length form comics, which are printed on pages that are traditionally shorter in length than in height.

At some point in the history of comics compilations of comic strips were published in rectangular formats that favoured the strip format, with two or three strips per page, but the strips, even when they were part of long narrative arcs, were most of the times meant to work on their own, as self-contained narrative units that nonetheless were part of a longer whole. Longer narratives in serial comic books and the rise of the graphic novel prefer the multiple-layered panel layout, displaying a narrative mechanics on both axes, whereas the comic strip has traditionally been syntagmatic, working as a lineal, progressive sentence, starting and finishing in the same row of panels (strip). While the comic strip depends on a "landscape" (more horizontal than vertical) page format, longer comics narratives often rely on the "portrait" format (more vertical than horizontal).

This page from *Sin Titulo* is then fit for purpose, its physical dimensions adapted to fit a computer screen. The first and last panels (1st and 8th) lack any kind of figurative illustration, a block of black only interrupted by contrasting white (hand-made style) lettering in the middle. The drawn nature of the lettering inside the panel, free from the constraints of a speech balloon or caption box, anchors the writing in the domain of the graphic image.

Literally (at the level of textual surface) set *in medias res* (in the middle of the story), the lettering draws itself into the imaginary of the narrative: the reader is supposed to perceive the darkness, but to hear the voice represented by the writing. The voice is *off* whilst being *in*: the writing is phantasmatical because it is there without being there. The reader *knows*, without necessarily being conscious

why, that this voice belongs to the unseen dreamer. The dreamer-narrator only appears before us until the third panel, in which we see a foot "sink[ing] in the sand", a foot that is perceived from above, as if it were the reader's. This is not unlike an uncanny dream-effect: the conative frame only reveals a segment of a body part of the protagonist, but this body part could also be, in the realm of imaginary fiction, the reader's.

The duo-tonal colouring emphasises the strangeness of this quiet scene, where everything seems to be something which it is not. Like aged photographs, the sepia sand works like a filter between fiction and reality, the dreamer and the conscious narrator and between the story and the reader. The layout is mainly horizontal, the position in which humans sleep, and it extends in time and space like an uncanny reflection: who is the body silhouetted against the landscape, under that enigmatic tree? (What do these moment/scenes remind us of?) The protagonist's face? This reflective effect is emphasised by the mirror structure of the two strip layers, where blackness and voice are both the starting and the ending point of something else.

The page is there to make us want to know what is to happen next. It wants us to click and be in that place and moment that follows the dreamer waking up. Stewart's chromatic choices are opaque, and this opacity exacerbates the feeling of an uncanny, half-remembered dream. Like a dream, the page works like a visual blow, and the sense of temporal passage and our understanding of what is real is disjointed. It is as if the page were both nightmare and oracle, concerned with the present (of storytelling, of reading) and the future, of what lies ahead, for the characters, for us, for comics, when we decide to turn the page, or rather, click again.

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Gasoline Alley, 22 April 1934

By Roberto Bartual

GASOLINE ALLEY
BREEZIK, WHAT MAKES YOU THINK HENRY THE EIGHTH WAS AN AVIATOR?
OH, I THOUGHT YOU SAID HENRY — THE ACE!
IF YOU CAN CAN
I'M COMIN UP TO GET.
THERE'S CLARENCE
WATCH ME SOCK THIS BEHIND HIM AN' SCARE HIM.
JIGGERS! HERE HE COMES.
YOU WILL WILL YOU? I'LL PULL YOUR EARS FOR THAT!
YOU'LL HAVE TO CATCH US FIRST
THAT'S EASY
COME IN QUICK BEFORE HE SEES US. "PIKE"
HE'S ON TO US! BEAT IT.
GO AHEAD AND JUMP!
YOU'RE HOME ON ME DON'T WORRY — I'LL FIND YOU!
ALL RIGHT PROMISE YOU WON'T DO IT AGAIN
I WON'T — NOT UNTIL NEXT TIME!
I'M WARNIN' YOU I'M KEEPIN' MY EYE ON YOU
THAT'S OKAY WITH US, CLARENCE

King, F. O. (1934) *Gasoline Alley* (April)

The opinion that modernism never existed in comics is quite common and it is based on a simple fact: apart from some titles that were influenced by the avant-garde (mainly, surrealism, as in *Little Nemo* and *Krazy Kat*), the first centuries of comics are characterized by straight-forward narratives quite indifferent to the experiments being carried out in the field of literature at their time.

Ruben Varillas mentions Feininger's *The Kin-der Kids* as one of the few early comics we may apply the adjective "modernist" to (Varillas, 2010: 5). Feininger was a painter, commonly associated with expressionism, and it is certain that his artwork for *The Kin-der Kids* strongly recall modernist painting, in particular his very recognizable urban landscapes that inspired the classic German film *Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari* (1920).

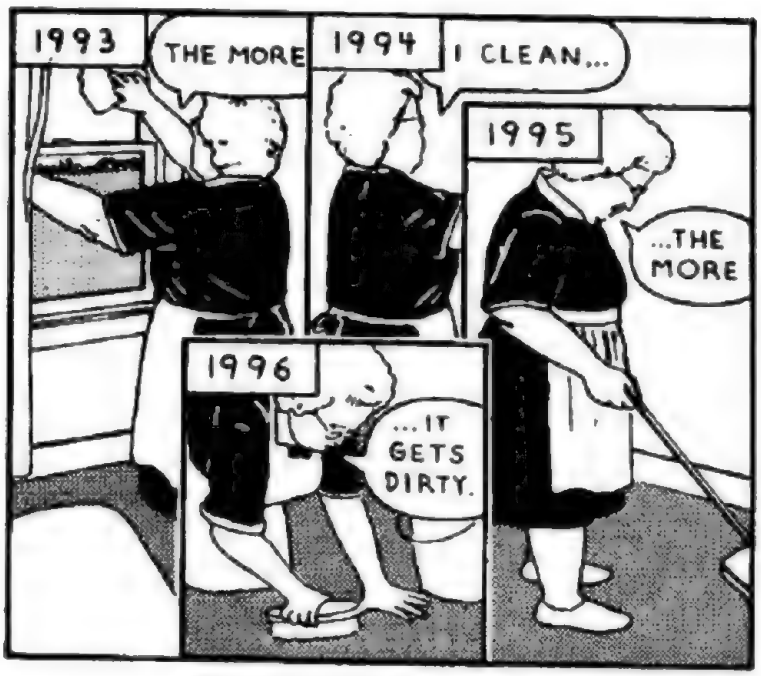
However, we should add at least another cartoonist to that one-name list of modernist comic creators. That name is Frank O. King, best known for his long-running *Gasoline Alley* series that recorded on a day-to-day basis the life of Walt and Skeezix, a father and a son, who aged at the same rhythm the readers did. The idea of "real time" literature was not new; James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* cover a time-span in the life of their characters which approximately coincides with the time it takes to read the book. But the most important influences of modernism in *Gasoline Alley* shall be found in its Sunday pages, particularly in King's very characteristic splash pages with present a single image (a beach, a block of a neighborhood, a house) fragmented by a number of panels.

These splash pages are not just an ingenious narrative gimmick but also a very sophisticated approach to representing memory. As Proust constantly verified in *À la recherché du temps perdu*, memory is often triggered by a geographical space: the house we used to live in, a street we used to walk when we visited the person we loved, a town we used to spend our holidays in. What is more, one place can trigger several images of different times, merging them together in the same space; how many different memories can we evoke just by walking inside the room of our childhood? Each of its corners brings back a different image of the past. This non-linear, space-dependent notion of memory was condensed by Proust in the description he gives of Combray's cathedral in *Du côté de chez Swann* (1913). Each part of the fictional cathedral dates from a different period: its walls were built in the 11th century, the arcade of the tower-stair is gothic (mid 12th century to 15th century) and the crypt, Merovingian (8th century). Proust reflects upon this:

> [The cathedral was] a building which occupied, so to speak, four dimensions of space —the name of the fourth being Time— which had sailed the centuries with that old nave, where bay after bay, chapel after chapel, seemed to stretch across and hold down and conquer not merely a few yards of soil, but each successive epoch from which the whole building had emerged triumphant. (Proust, 1957:74)

Visiting the house of our childhood is, for Proust, like walking inside Combray's cathedral: each room brings back the image of a different time in history and the whole building contains all the images together. Inadvertently or not, what Frank King did in the *Gasoline Alley* Sunday page shown above was a graphic version of Proust's metaphor of memory. If we had a map of Proust's cathedral, we would be able to read Combray's history in it; each fragment of the nave, a different period of time. Likewise, each fragment, or panel of Frank King's house records a different moment of a single day, like a map of memory. If Skeezix would be able to look at this same picture years later, the rooftop will bring him back the memory of joining there the girl he loved, the catwalk will trigger the memory of being chased by their friend Clarence, and the sight of the cement will remind him of his final victory against his friend. Like us, whenever we look at the page, Skeezix would see everything that happened that day in a simultaneous manner.

It is the experience of memory as a simultaneous perception of time what Marcel Proust tried to achieve in *À la recherché du temps perdu* but he had to deal with one important fact: we can remember many things at the same time, but we can't read two paragraphs of a book at the same time. Comics, a medium generally ignorant of modernism, is ironically the only medium with the privilege of representing memory the way Proust wanted, since we are able to see two images at the same time. This *Gasoline Alley* Sunday page is a proof of it. But there are many others...



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Big Numbers, Small Moments

By Tony Venezia

Moore, A. and Sienkiewicz, B. (1990) *Big Numbers* (Northampton: Mad Love, #2, p.3)

This tier of panels from Alan Moore and Bill Sienkiewicz's maddeningly incomplete comic *Big Numbers*[1] offers a tantalising glimpse of what promised to be a fascinating and experimental project. So what are we looking at? The tier offers a single moment fractured and broken up but also complete, the panels operating both individually and collectively as single and multiple units capturing a sense of both simultaneity and flux. The eye is drawn to the two figures in the middle two panels: the young woman gazing sadly at the spectral figure of the little girl while partially obscured characters linger on the periphery of the table drinking tea.

This domestic snapshot, with the intrusive ghostly presence, offers a glimpse, both structurally and in terms of subject matter, of the bigger picture in *Big Numbers*. The young woman is Christine Gathercole, a writer whose return home to Hampton (actually a thinly disguised analogue for Moore's home town of Northampton) initiates the narrative. The ghostly figure of the girl is first seen on a taxi ride home from the train station after Christine lets slip that she had an abortion some years earlier. Christine's story is itself part of a wider, total narrative that involves a massive shopping development in the town (the "big numbers" of the title), incorporating multiple perspectives. Following reflexive genre epics such as *V for Vendetta* and *Watchmen*, *Big Numbers* was an (over-)ambitious attempt at making a comic that was both concerned with everyday, small moments and their connection to wider forces.

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1 Alan Moore and Bill Sienkiewicz, *Big Numbers*, two issues (1990). Art for a third issue was completed by Al Columbia and was recently posted online. Moore's outline for *Big Numbers* can be found in Gary Spencer Millidge's biography *Alan Moore: Storyteller* (Lewes: ILEX, pp. 170–173)

In the above tier, it is perhaps the activity of sitting around drinking tea that perfectly captures a sense of everyday Englishness at work in the text. This is interrupted by the ghost at the table (like Banquo, we're never sure whether the little girl is objectively real within the diegesis or a figment of another character's imagination). Here we can see elements of both the familiar alongside the (de-familiarising) unfamiliar that subtends the everyday. Ben Highmore proposes that: 'The non-everyday (the exceptional) is there to be found in the heart of the everyday.' (Highmore, 2002:3).

Big Numbers is constituted by these quotidian moments, often dis-located by elements of the unfamiliar (and in this case, the uncanny). The everyday activity of drinking tea also establishes the act of consumption as a recurring motif throughout the comic. This is continued in the second tier of panels reproduced below – where Christine visits her elderly father, who is busily eating breakfast on the toilet while watching the news on television (thereby wittily if bluntly linking consumption with excretion).

Moore, A. and Sienkiewicz, B. (1990) *Big Numbers,* (Northampton: Mad Love, #2, p.9)

Visually, there is repetition with little variation indicating a slowing down of both the experience of reading and the time of the action. Overlaid onto this are two distinct dialogue tracks, from the conversation between father and daughter ("Urr, God! What's this in the fridge?") and the commentary of the news report ("On a lighter note, from Birmingham") that connects the domestic and the local to wider national networks.

This slowness is a part of the comics language of the everyday as Greice Schneider has forcefully argued: 'one of the rich resources for conveying the everyday in comics is through the manipulation not only of the time frames of the stories, but also of the relations between them, playing with narrative rhythm.' (Schneider, 2010:51). The articulation between narrative subject and narrative structure in the representation of the everyday is evident throughout *Big Numbers*.

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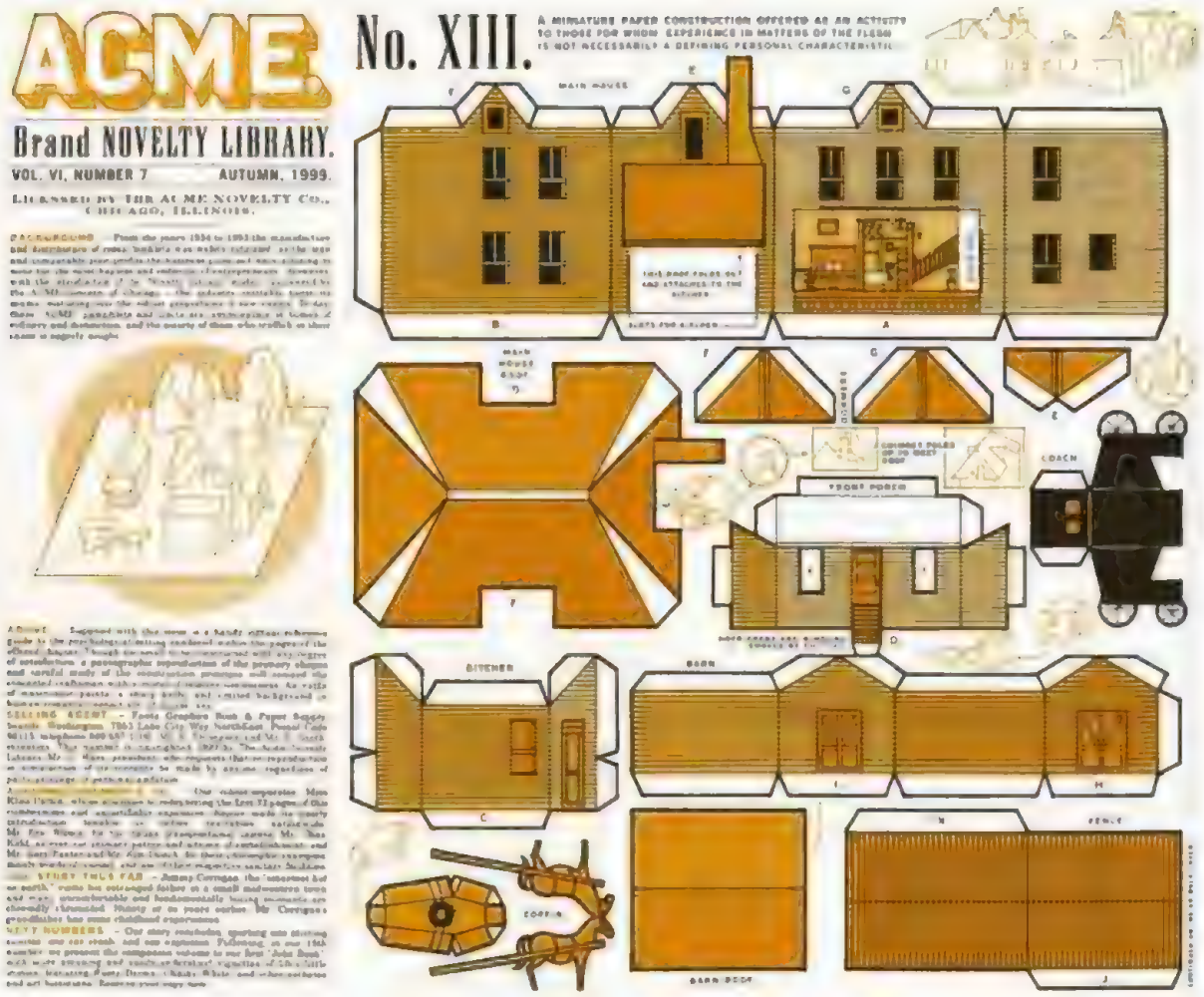
Would you admit it? (On Chris Ware's Cut-outs)

by Esther Claudio



Ware, C. (2000) *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth* (New York: Pantheon)

In an interview between Will Eisner and Frank Miller conducted by Charles Brownstein, Eisner says: "Nobody I started with except Will Eisner had the temerity to admit that he loved the medium and that he would spend the rest of his life doing it." One of the things I love from Chris Ware's works is that they reflect upon the medium itself, about its reception, and they question the artistic framework in which comics are inserted.

The cut-outs in *Jimmy Corrigan,* for example, provide a space to comment about the issue by simultaneously boycotting and questioning not only the work itself but also the medium of comics.

In fact, they abruptly interrupt the flow of narration and work as digressions that come to challenge the semiotics and architecture of the work. They are, in the end, metafiction, devices that self-consciously address the work, exposing its narrative strategies bare.

In the cut-out of the house that we have chosen to reproduce here, we can read:

> As such "paper activities" are sometimes dismissed as "child's play" or frivolous "hokum" of no value to the serious student of literature, it is hoped that these uncultured negative preconceptions – which really do serve no other purpose than to truncate one's experience of an evocative work – shall be disspelt by the dainties' masterful aesthetic and artistic qualities.

The house, as a representation of the book, bears the same preconceptions usually attributed to comics. The cut-out and *Jimmy Corrigan*, are perceived as mere "work with paper", a "child's play", that "a serious student of literature" would not appreciate. When the cut-out stops the narration and stands as "the thing itself", as Bredehoft states, it opens a space to question those prejudices and to reflect on the artistic production that serves as a frame for the work. Chris Ware himself is very aware of the reception comics have, even amongst the most avant-garde artistic currents, and he writes:

> Such an unfortunate cultural situation serves only to associate an otherwise potentially effective language with such juvenilia as lawn games, pony races, and gaily-costumed musclemen, thus greatly compromising both the maturity of material available for consumption and the happiness of those willing to submit to a life of companionless mockery in blind pursuit of its production.

Aware that graphic novels are considered as commodities for children or "musculated men", Ware complains that creators are underestimated. Therefore, from the very beginning, with these words on the cover, the work becomes not only an exercise of artistic innovation but also a sarcastic reflection on its reception and its transformation. Challenging the possible prejudices of the reader towards comics, the author attempts to subvert with intricate metaphors, symbolism, and illustrations, the commonly accepted association of comics and immaturity (mentally or artistically).

Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth, becomes thus a threat to the reader's horizon of expectations. To dive in it implies to establish oneself outside everything and look at reality with the eyes of an outcast. Such perspective serves to place the reader on the narrative, aesthetic and cultural margins that the book aims to question and destroy. From the words chosen to the zoetrope, from the *mise en page* to metafiction, *Jimmy Corrigan* is an exercise of deconstruction which effectively manages to subvert the reader's expectations. Chris Ware, like Spiegelman, Satrapi or McCloud among

others, belongs to a new wave of revolutionary creators who question and subvert general rejection, not only through brilliantly elaborated works, but also and especially, through serious reflection on the issue. Following Eisner, they "have the temerity to admit that they love the medium" and, what is more, to evidence its magnificent potential.

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Jack Survives – Jerry Moriarty

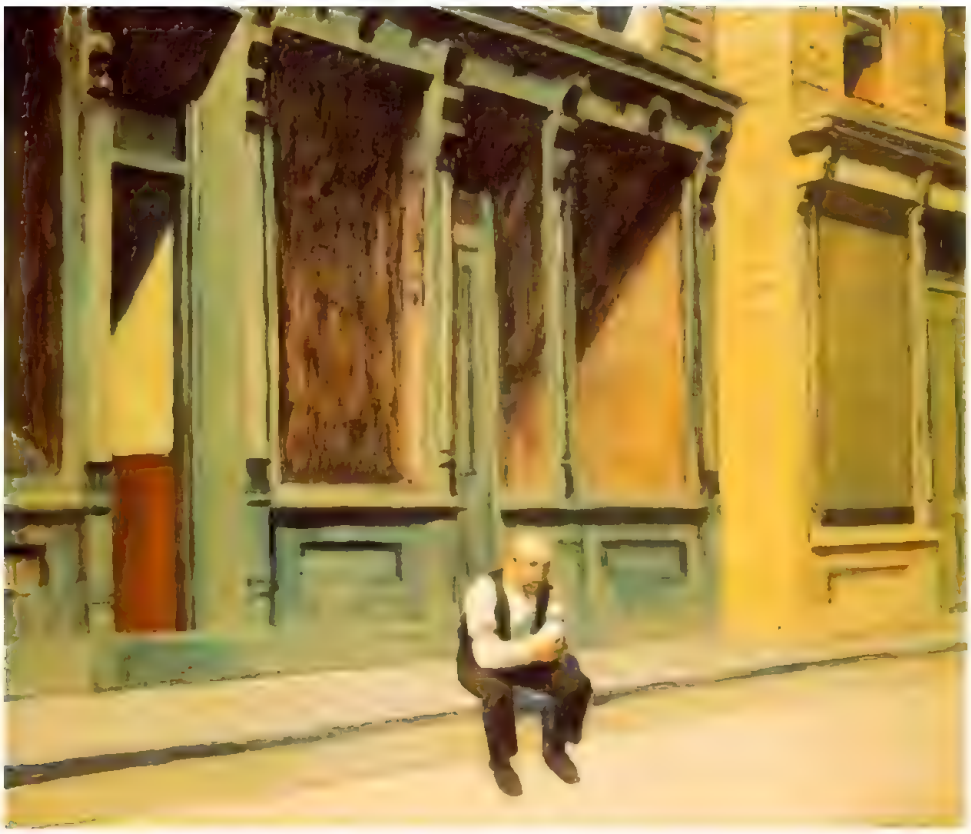
by Greice Schneider

Moriarty, J. (2009) *Jack Survives* (Oakland: Buenaventura Press) (no pagination)

This kind of everyday scene portrayed by Jerry Moriarty in his series *Jack Survives* might be taken as a cliché of a certain kind of comics being made nowadays, but pages like this used to be the exception three decades ago, even for an avant-garde magazine like *RAW*, where the stories were first published. Nothing really happens in this one-page shot, but there is so much going on in these three panels.

At a first sight, we see this middle-aged man sitting outside, drinking a cup of coffee and smoking. This kind of scenario reminds the paintings of Edward Hopper, like *Sunday*, for example. Thematically, both artists address overlapping periods and place: the United States in the 40's/50's. While Hopper was devoted to portray an America contemporary to him (even if through a gaze

filtered by noir movies), Moriarty, who was working decades later, chose to place his stories in the period his father – who inspired the character – was 40 years old. That could explain similarities in costumes and façades – note, for example, Jack's hat, tie and cigarette working together to build almost a stereotype of a certain era.



Hopper, E. (1926) *Sunday* (The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C)

Both artists also share a fascination with everyday situations and the interaction of human and urban landscapes. Most of the pages from *Jack Survives* tackle some aspect of the uneventful everyday: shoelaces, broken TV, sandwiches, lamps, cloud shapes, health insurance. Although they follow similar structure of the one page gags, there is no pun involved: the incongruities highlighted here can be classified as overlooked, usual, banal. But it is precisely this shift of perspective that makes possible to grant the label of humour to these stories.

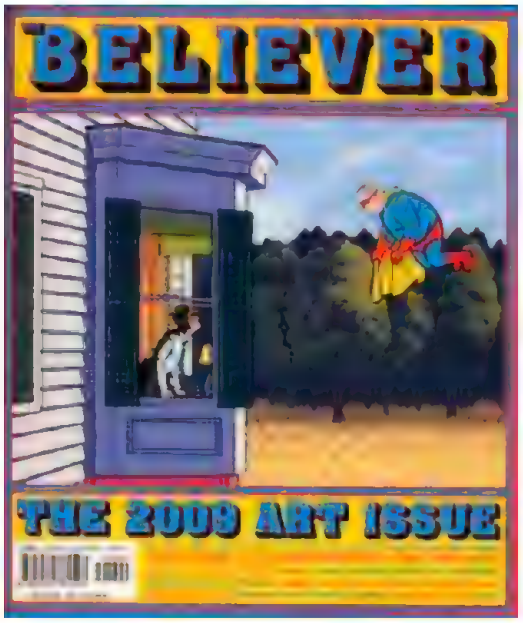
What is most striking, though, is how both works relate to time, or more specifically, the way time is suspended, despite the obvious differences between the reading processes involved in paintings and comics. In these three panels from *Jack Survives*, it's possible to grasp a sense of dead time. In the first panel – a large square occupying two thirds of the page – there's nothing that suggests a move towards an action: Jack's position is static, his gaze is not directed to something specific and

his hands are occupied by the pair coffee and cigarette – that would reinforce the idea of an interval, of "taking a time".

In Hopper's paintings, although characters are usually not engaged in a particular action, there is also this sense of "in between times" that evokes a sense of narrativity, despite being single fixed images. Fresnault-Deruelle calls this *"les limbes du récit"* (something like the story's limbos) (188). When analyzing paintings by Hopper (or Delvaux and Balthus) the author notes that their only narrative potentiality lays precisely in the indefinitely extended suspense. It's the pause, the interlude, the "in between times", and the very refusal of showing the action itself that keeps the power of evocation, the desire of approaching these works (190-192).

This temporal impression of a time that accumulates is also found in the type of light used by both artists. In the case of Hopper, colors and shadows are in service of an illumination particular to a certain hour of the day when light changes fast. Although the chromatic resources are not used by Moriarty – who opts rather for black and white palette - the incidence of the same type of light still seems to be important, hence the angle of the shadows in his scenes.

Even what his few words indicate a situation of stagnation. There are two balloons in the page. The first one says "glad there's no crime here" – a declaration of satisfaction with a calm and peaceful neighborhood, directed to no one else but the readers, as a contemplative sigh, before moving the cigarette back to the mouth. The text merges graphically with the rest, and even the balloon is not taken as a separate entity, but it is hiding behind the pillar, as a real object in the scenario. The same visual trick is applied in the second balloon: here the emptiness just underlines the silence of the scene.[1]



Burns, C. (2009) *The Believer* (November/December 2009, Cover Illustration)

The comparison with the painter, thus, cannot be boiled down to common choice of themes, or the simple fact that Moriarty uses painting to do his comics (he likes to call himself a 'paintoonist') (Ware, 2009). As a matter of fact, concerning painting styles, they have important differences, not only in color, but also in density, for example. Moriarty's thick brushstrokes of black and white could be translated temporally, as layers of accumulated time, invoking not only "now", but a compound of memory as well.

1 As a matter of fact, a closer look at the reprint allows us to see the layers behind the white and trace back the symptomatic choice to erase the text originally written in that space ("a dog napping seen I?")

All these resemblances with Hopper are hardly unnoticed. In an interview published in the magazine *The Believer*, Chris Ware introduces Moriarty's work "as if Edward Hopper had taken up songwriting" (2009). Charles Burns plays with these similarities, in the cover of the same issue, in a citation to a painting of Hopper, featuring two characters from both artists – Jack and Jimmy Corrigan.

Ware also notes how few attention has been given to Moriarty's work, and it's not difficult to speculate over the reasons why that happens. Perhaps, besides Moriarty's known rejection for the art world, his uneventful themes lacked the kind of drama that seems necessary to reach the canon at that period. But it is precisely the novelty in the attention to the unnoticed – a trend that would spread in the following years – that makes him so relevant. In the end, it is not really what Jack does that matters, but how he goes on surviving.

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Footnotes in Gaza, by Joe Sacco

by Nina Mickwitz

Sacco, J. (2009) *Footnotes in Gaza* (London: Jonathan Cape, 50-1) [Image annotated by author]

The first half of this double page spread consists of two large close-up portraits; first the face of the old fighter who has been the topic of the previous chapter. Beneath him we see the face of Khaled, who is on the run from the Israeli army at the time of telling, framed equally tightly.

The chapter title '*The Wanted*' in conjunction with the two men's faces connotes posters of outlaws or law-enforcement image banks, however the visual qualities of the image counteracts this association. There are clear similarities in the depiction of these two individuals; the lined foreheads, determined expressions on chiselled (to the point of gauntness) features and an unflinching gaze, the younger man looking perhaps more acutely tired. The dark shadow running down the middle of the page creates a vertical line connecting the two men's faces even closer, visually and metaphorically.

In combination with the interwoven panels opposite this page further seems to underscore visually (as the text narrative reinforces) that this conflict spans generations. Added to this one might speculate on the closely framed faces, which (were they photographs would not just recall, but be mug-shots) by their proportionally large scale become something more akin to intimate portraits –encouraging identification rather than objectification.

Page 51 has four horizontal panels of equal size and proportions; thus dividing the page into four strips. The *récitatifs* (Miller, 2007: 97) placed at angles within the picture plane visually indicate a more integrated and involved narration than the conventional placing along the panel edge.

Sacco's own closely cropped profile can be seen in the far left of the first panel, at an angle turned towards his interviewee, enabling the reader to 'see over his shoulder' in the way often used in TV interviews. The topic of the interview (that of Khaled having executed Palestinian collaborators in his younger days) is not depicted in a separate panel but rather flows on, to the right of Khaled.

A compositional vector runs from Sacco's mouth, accentuated by the initial speech bubble to Khaled's eyes and then in the opposite direction by the arm, hand and gun of the hooded executioner. This diagonal can be seen as stretching from the point where the hood breaks the panel's edge to the lower right-hand side of the panel, where again his victim's shirt-collar and shoulder extend beyond the panel's edge. The background changes from white, through a gradually denser cross-hatching to complete black on the right hand side of the panel; differentiating between the two situations in time and in mood, and adding to the overall dramatic tension.

In panel two the pointed gun creates a distinct right to left direction, but the angle of the roof of the truck with the soldiers mirrors it on the left side of the panel. This shape in turn mirrors the compositional lines in the first panel, while the lines articulating the shadow of the truck on the road and the curb echo it.

In the third panel the machine guns being pointed create a vector from left to right. This left to right movement is mirrored again in the last panel, by the positioning of the characters; further away and smaller in the left hand corner, with the children's faces near the bottom edge, Khaled in the centre and his mother's face (which in close-up matches the size and distress of the face in the first panel) on the far right side.

Khaled's arm is held vertical as he fires his gun in a gesture of defiance (exceeding the panel's edge again) and this symbolism reverberates in the synecdoche of the cross-panel constellation of Khaled and the two soldiers. The serial overlapping of each panel across the frame of the preceding panel further works to create a kind of interlinking or weaving. Following Groensteen's (2007) terminology this would however be part of the restricted arthrology rather than tressage. This compositional dynamic can simultaneously be read in terms of the self-perpetuating nature of violence and brutality.

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Of *Maus* and Work-in-progressness

by Ernesto Priego

Unlike other works or art, which usually remain unknown to the public until they are released, comics published in installments can modify their own narrative development almost in "real time", sometimes according to readers' reactions. This gives serialised comics a much more flexible, even interactive characteristic that emphasises the openness of their narrative work.

Art Spiegelman's *Maus* is no exception. Before it was published as a book in two volumes it was serialised in *RAW*, the avant-garde comix magazine edited by Spiegelman and his wife, Françoise Mouly. This gave *Maus* a public exposure even before the whole work was finished, highlighting its "work-in-progressness":

...IT'S SOMETHING THAT WORRIES ME ABOUT THE BOOK I'M DOING ABOUT HIM...
IN SOME WAYS HE'S JUST LIKE THE RACIST CARICATURE OF THE MISERLY OLD JEW.
HAH! YOU CAN SAY THAT AGAIN!

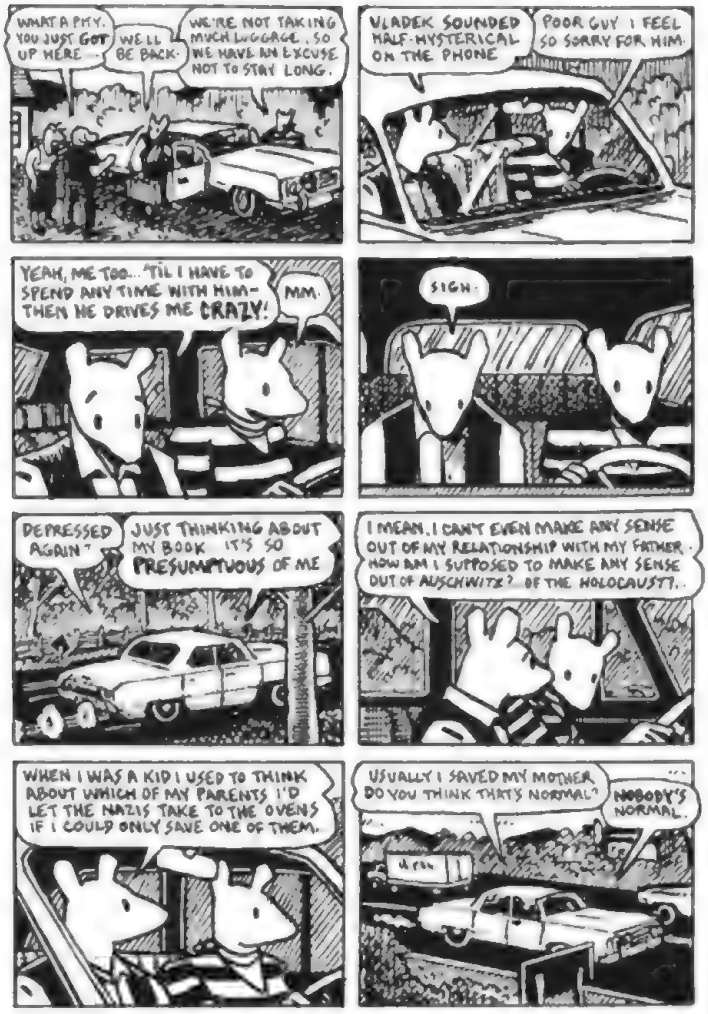
Spiegelman, A. (1986) *Maus: A Survivor's Tale. I: My Father Bleeds History* (New York: Pantheon, 131,7-8)

In the panels above, Artie expresses the melancholia caused by the double bind in which he is trapped by trying to deal with his father's story (and, as we know, with his own story with his father) through comics. The ironic effect provoked by the juxtaposition of the word "caricature" in a dialogue uttered by a cartoon character unavoidably indicates an illuminating self-reflexivity.

By blurring (and deliberately confusing) the distinction between empirical author and fictional persona, Spiegelman appears conscious that every representational practice implies a distortion ("caricature" is indeed understood as the graphic distortion of recognisable features, usually to achieve a humorous, ironic or parodic effect) and that this is problematic when one is attempting a narrative which makes "truth claims" (Ricoeur 1988:188-192), like the testimony of a Holocaust survivor.

Mala, Vladek's present wife, replies in agreement with the idiomatic expression "Ha! You can say that again!" permitting an interesting polysemia that surpasses simplistic humor. Beyond the pun, the everyday normality of Mala's conversation with Artie in the context of a typical complaint about his father gets complicated into another indicative of artistic self-reflexivity.

In the literal sense of the idiom, "it can be said again" because, in Mala's conception, Vladek is indeed an "old miserly Jew". But it can be said again because it has been repeated, reproduced from Artie's and Mala's "live" speech and transcribed into the comic book; it can be said again because a comic book, heavily based on cartooning and mechanical reproduction, is destined to caricaturise its subjects; it can be said again because a distinct motif in the comic is repetition itself.


WHAT A PHY. YOU JUST GOT UP HERE
WE'LL BE BACK.
WE'RE NOT TAKING MUCH LUGGAGE, SO WE HAVE AN EXCUSE NOT TO STAY LONG.
VLADEK SOUNDED HALF-HYSTERICAL ON THE PHONE
POOR GUY I FEEL SO SORRY FOR HIM.
YEAH, ME TOO... 'TIL I HAVE TO SPEND ANY TIME WITH HIM- THEN HE DRIVES ME CRAZY!
MM.
SIGH.
DEPRESSED AGAIN?
JUST THINKING ABOUT MY BOOK IT'S SO PRESUMPTUOUS OF ME
I MEAN, I CAN'T EVEN MAKE ANY SENSE OUT OF MY RELATIONSHIP WITH MY FATHER.. HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO MAKE ANY SENSE OUT OF AUSCHWITZ? OF THE HOLOCAUST?..
WHEN I WAS A KID I USED TO THINK ABOUT WHICH OF MY PARENTS I'D LET THE NAZIS TAKE TO THE OVENS IF I COULD ONLY SAVE ONE OF THEM.
USUALLY I SAVED MY MOTHER DO YOU THINK THAT'S NORMAL?
NOBODY'S NORMAL

Spiegelman, A. (1991) *Maus: A Survivor's Tale. II: And Here My Troubles Began* (New York: Pantheon, 1:16)

At the beginning of the second volume, Mala, tired of Vladek's obsessive behavior, decides to leave him. Desperate, he calls his son, interrupting Artie and Françoise's holiday in Vermont to ask them to go and see him in the Catskills.

The incident triggers in Artie a reflection on his relationship to his family and the influence of the Holocaust on their past and present life, but above all, on the attempt of representing them in his book:

Artie's self-reflexive speech takes the form of a melancholic soliloquy. This page is an example of how *Maus'* self-reflexivity as a comic book can create subtle ironic effects through a series of juxtapositions of seemingly contradictory notions. Linda Hutcheon remarks that "postmodern fiction suggests that to re-write or to re-present the past in fiction and in history is, in both cases, to open it up to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological" (1987: 209).

This rejection of a "conclusive and teleological" idea of history is exemplified by the self-awareness of this passage as part of a work in progress, making it open to the future. The "presentness" of the comic panel is used in this case to underscore this "work in progress" state of the narrative, even as we read it (when it is supposed to be finished, since it is published and in our hands as a book)[1].

The dramatic, monological characteristic of Artie's speech in this page is contrasted with the everyday nature of driving. The personal material expressed in the first three panels, referring to Artie's childhood and early youth, is treated in the same context as Spiegelman's creative process. The blurry boundaries between private and public are made evident again by their juxtaposition. In Orvell's words, "Spiegelman [...] writes out of compulsion to understand the heavy weight of the past as both a public and a private burden" (1992: 126).

The "borderline discourse" of *Maus* seems to be partly constructed with the mechanics of irony. Irony (not only linguistic but created by its contrast with the images) works on the basis of a tension between opposites. Artie considers "forgetting the whole thing," unleashing again a rich polysemy, since it is obvious, in more than one level, that forgetting "the whole thing" is and has been impossible. First of all because the book ("the whole thing") is in our hands (the bookness of the book is its very thingness); we know Artie/Spiegelman did in the end finish the book. Secondly, because what made Spiegelman (and, with and through Artie) create the book in the first place was the impossibility of forgetting "the whole thing", i.e., the Holocaust, his mother's suicide, his "ghost" brother, the troubles with his father and the latter's death.

Another contrast is highlighted by the last two panels: while Artie accepts that "reality is too complex for comics", the last panel proves that comics *can indeed* deal with "real life" by self-reflexively declare its fictive nature as representation. Françoise's reply, "just keep it honest, honey", seems belated since apparently that is exactly what Spiegelman did, since we are witnessing this otherwise private conversation. This creates an interesting space-time intertwining that, without the need for a direct address to the reader, displays a profound fictional self-awareness.

By accepting its limitations as a representational practice, Spiegelman's comic book paradoxically achieves what it acknowledges is beyond its powers. The overall melancholy feeling of the work is emphasised by this paradoxical consciousness of impossibility.

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1 From the perspective of the reader's refiguration of the work, this posed a different complexity if the passage was read when it was first published in *Raw* and not in the collected edition published later. Esther Claudio is currently researching metafiction in comics.

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It's a Bird – Steven T. Seagle and Teddy Kristiansen

by Esther Claudio

NOR DID I RATIONALIZE THAT SUPERMAN COULD HAVE SNUFFED THE HUNTER OUT LIKE A GNAT AFTER THEIR FIRST MEETING.
I LET THE STORY TAKE ME INTO IT..
AS THE PAGES ROLLED BY, I BOUGHT INTO THE CRISIS. BELIEVED IN THE DANGER.
AND AT THE END THOUGH I NEVER WOULD HAVE ADMITTED IT, I WAS EMOTIONALLY INVESTED.
I WANTED TO TURN THE PAGE AND KNOW WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN NEXT.
WHICH IS THE LESSON STORIES CAN TEACH LIFE.
THERE'S ALWAYS A "NEXT." ALWAYS.
THAT'S WHAT SUPERMAN IS ALL ABOUT. TO REMIND US THAT WE HAVE HURDLES
...BUT AS LONG AS WE KEEP JUMPING THEM...
WE'RE IN THE RACE.

Seagle, S. T. and Kristiansen, T. (2004) *It's a Bird* (New York: DC Comics, 119)

It's a Bird is a complex and meaningful autobiography in which the writer, Steven T. Seagle, tries to exorcise his fears regarding Huntington's disease through the myth of Superman.

Huntington's disease is hereditary and has no known cure. It produces a long degeneration that physically and morally destroys those who suffer it. The book tells how Seagle thinks that he will

probably develop it, for his grandmother and his aunt had it. In the page above, illustrated by Teddy Kristiansen, the disease, Superman and the author's life are combined to reach the climax of the story.

Using the definitions provided by Thierry Groensteen in his book *Système de la bande dessinée* (1999), we could say that these panels occupy an outstanding lieu in the tressage of the work because they dramatise the climax of the plot[1]. They constitute the turning point, the crossroads, where all the diegetic paths converge and where the questions raised at the beginning are solved. Concretely, the protagonist's life, his childhood and the figure of Superman find their own place (both physical and metaphorical, that is, their site and their lieu), their meaning within the work, what in this case will entail, as we will see, the integration of all these aspects into the main character's life and thus the reconstruction of his identity.

Superman is the driving force of the final catharsis, of the reconciliation that Seagle undergoes with multiple aspects of his life. In this page we see a short story about Superman, two children reading it (first panel; top right) and two people hugging (third panel; bottom left). The children reading are little Steven and his brother David. This panel illustrates a moment which caused a profound change in the author's life– the moment when one realises that fantastic happy endings do not exist in real life.

In Seagle's case, it all happened after his grandmother died of Huntington's, when he and his brother were little. That day, both spent the afternoon reading the comic, and the hope provided by the happy ending of its pages in contrast with their grandmother's dead led little Steven to forever reject this kind of fantastic stories. For this reason, Huntington's disease and Superman are virtually synonymous in the author's life. Consequently, the reconciliation with his childhood is also a reconciliation with the superhero and, as we see in the page layout, both personal aspects find their place herein by being physically included in the narration about Superman.

The panel down on the left where two men are hugging stands out from the others through the thick black frame that separates it from the rest. The man in black represents Steven T. Seagle himself hugging his father after a fist fight. This fight started after bringing up the issue of the disease because it was a strong taboo that the family had always hid. The fear and embarrassment they both felt led them to use their fists but in the fight, Seagle realises for the first time in his life that his father feels the same fear for the Huntington as he does. In fact, that disproportionate and violent reaction which leads his father to attack him is no more than a way to express that fear. And in that moment, against all odds and for the first time, Seagle identifies with his father and with his fears.

1 As Thierry Groensteen explains, the tressage is the reading that makes it possible to establish the metaphorical connections between the different panels in a comic. It depends on the reader to decipher this interdependency, so it is an additional relation, which is not essential to follow the story. In every comic, each panel occupies a physical space, certain coordinates, within the page layout. This is called the site. The lieu, on the contrary, is the metaphorical space that a panel would occupy in the whole work, in the tressage. (see Groensteen, 1999: 171-176)

For the first time he realises that he had been denying that reality, that possibility and that fear just as his father had been doing all his life. Therefore by identifying with him, by hugging him, Seagle is also hugging his own fears.

During the fight, the protagonist not only identifies with his father, but also with Superman. The episode of Superman gathered herein narrates a fight between the superhero and some beasts with superpowers led by a villain. Both fights are overlapped and in the panel framed in black, Seagle and his father appear as part of the happy ending of a Superman story.

This story mirrors Seagle's fight so he introduces the argument with his father as part of an episode of Superman by saying: "What would a Superman story be without a fight scene?"(2004: 113). But who is Superman here? Arguably, Seagle himself, for Seagle's catharsis is visually linked to the identification with the superhero, to the transformation of Seagle into the hero of his own epic, capable of facing all obstacles that arise in his way.

As Marilyn R. Chandler points out, the writing of an autobiography is a healing art because "designing and telling a life story is purgative, reconstructive, integrative, transformative activity. The basic requirements of narrative – pattern, structure, closure, coherence, balance – all engage a writer in creating a whole out of fragments of experience " (1989: 6).

In It's a bird, not only does the author succeed in coming to terms with his traumas, he also provides the reader with a brilliant, moving and meaningful work. Seagle overcomes his traumas by relating his own life and by using a different narrative, the story of Superman, as a framework for his autobiography. In the embrace with his father, Seagle is also embracing his own future, a future full of hope in which, at last, he has left behind his fear for the disease. It is an embrace with his own identity, accepting that part of himself. It is an embrace with the child he was, with that childhood with no place for happy endings. And it is also a reconciliation with the superhero and what it symbolizes. Because comics like Superman "remind us that we have hurdles, but as long as we keep jumping them, we're in the race" (2004: 119)

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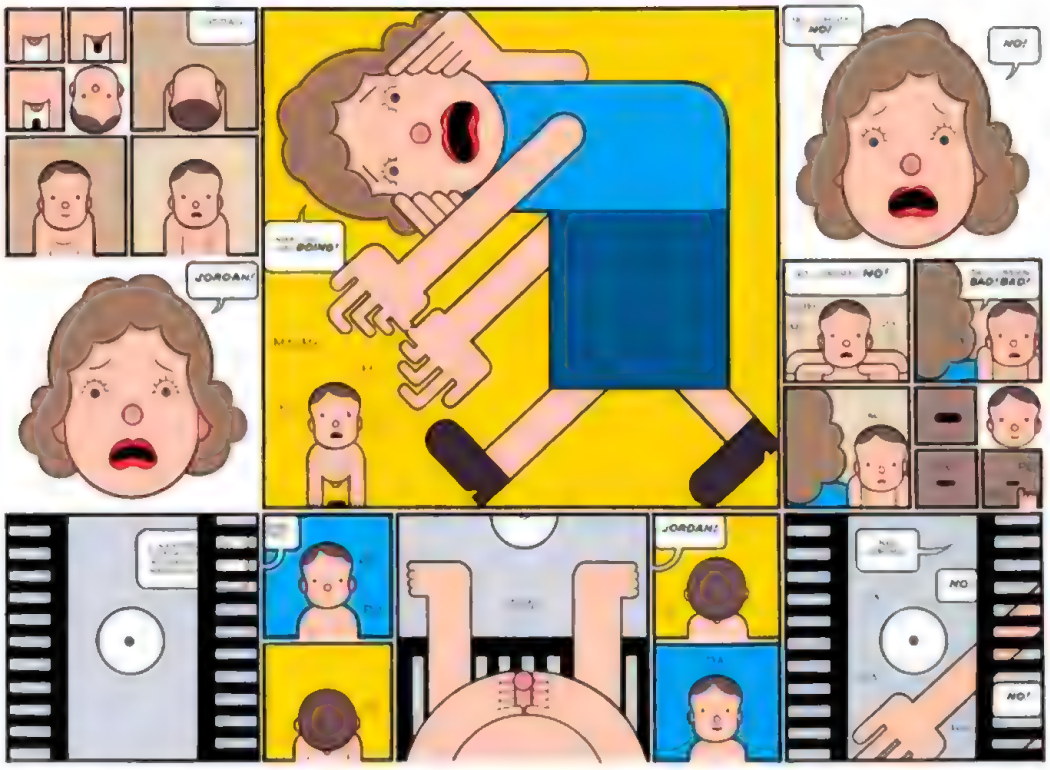
Inner Focalization: A Child's Game

by Roberto Bartual



Ware, C. (2010) *ACME Novelty Library* (Montréal: Drawn and Quarterly, #20: 6)

Acme Novelty Library #20, Chris Ware's last instalment of his ongoing graphic novel *Rusty Brown*, has certain surprises in stock. One of the most striking is related with its visual style: as the narration goes on, Ware's graphic trace becomes more solid and less schematic; something very unusual in his work, always biased towards a certain stylistic abstraction. It is often that we hear Ware comparing his protagonists with typographic characters, or the act of looking at his pictures with reading (Ware, quoted in Sabin, 1997: 41).

What's going on with *Acme* #20, then? This volume, also known as *Lint*, the name of its protagonist, is a more or less straightforward *Bildungsroman* (formation novel) that follows the progress of one of the bullies of the school where Rusty Brown studies, from his birth to his death. The changes in the graphic style are synchronised with the different stages of maturity of the protagonist; the last pages of the book have a rough, unsettlingly realistic appearance, but the first pages almost look like if they were drawn by a child.

Almost as if they were drawn by a child, but not quite. If you stare at a Picasso, you can bet that one out of five parents will give you their word that "my child can draw exactly like that". I don't know if many children can write like this:

> Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming along the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo... His father told him that story: his father looked at him through a glass: he had a hairy face. (Joyce, 1916: 3)

These are the first lines from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce, a book that relates language to stages of maturity in manner that resembles Ware's approach. This paragraph certainly looks like children's writing, but it is not: the election of the words is very deliberate, the rhythm and the sound too perfect. However there are certainly insistent traits of children language in the style: the use of iconicity and onomatopoeias (moocow), the absence of commas in the first sentence, the standardized opening expression (Once upon a time), the simplicity of vocabulary, the fixation on the face and the gaze of the father, etc.

In *Lint*, we can find the visual equivalents of all these linguistic traits, although the central role of the father is enacted by the mother. Since the father is almost always absent in Ware's narrations, she is the one in charge of uttering the archetypal word of castration "No". So, here, little Lint focus his attention on his mother's face, instead of his father's; her face is in fact the same iconic image repeated in three different panels, an archetypal image that is always looking at him. Not just "a mother", or "his mother", but "The Mother". Verbal language is very simplified too. In fact, all the words we can make out in the balloons are some of the few words any child of Lint's age would be able to understand: "no", his name, "bad" and "what are you doing?" The rest is gibberish: it's impossible to get any meaning from the words in the lower left corner of the page. The reason is simple: little Lint does not understand them.

But the most striking thing about this page is its style, too schematic even by Ware's standards (they even lack the isometric perspective characteristic of Ware's work). Lint and his mother are always shown from a frontal/lateral point of view, like the characters of early Sunday Pages: Ware turns to the origins of comic language to reproduce the origin of human language. In fact, the solution Ware adopts to represent the quick movement of the arms of Lint's mother, may be related to the very origins of visual sequentiality: Sergei Eisenstein affirmed that Shiva's multiple arms in ancient hindu statues were not meant to represent multiple arms but a moving pair; after all, Shiva is not only the God of destruction, but also the God of dance (Eisenstein, 1937-1940: 140-141; Bartual, 2008).

We can even find further Joycean echoes in this page if we consider that in episode 14 of *Ulysses*, when Mina Purefoy, a secondary character, gives birth, Joyce suddenly turns to the origins of the

English Literature using the alliterative language of Anglo-Saxon verse to describe the first moments in the life of Mina's child. My intention, when drawing all these comparisons, is not to justify Ware's work in the light of well-accepted, canonical, modernist literature, but to underline the fact that even if Chris Ware may not be the first artist to achieve inner focalization through stylistic choices in his art (that is, to make the reader see things as the protagonist does by changing the style of drawing; something that has been attempted too by Moore and Gebbie in *Lost Girls*), he is certainly the first to do so with such a high level of sophistication and detail.

For other instances of inner focalization in Ware's work (not by means of stylistic changes, but by means of mise en cadre and mise en page) see: Samson, J. and Peeters, B. (2010) *Chris Ware: la bande dessinée réinventé* (Montréal: Les Impressions Nouvelles).

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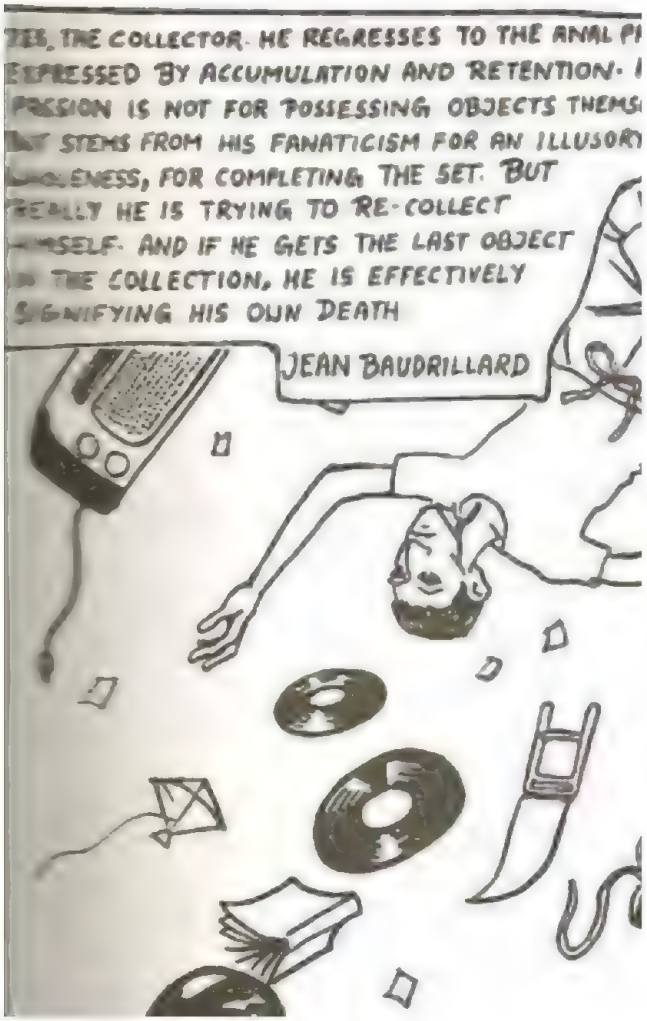
Sarnath Banerjee's *Portrait of the Comics Artist as a Collector*

by Ernesto Priego


THE COLLECTOR. HE REGRESSES TO THE ANAL P
EXPRESSED BY ACCUMULATION AND RETENTION.
PASSION IS NOT FOR POSSESSING OBJECTS THEMS
BUT STEMS FROM HIS FANATICISM FOR AN ILLUSOR
WHOLENESS, FOR COMPLETING THE SET. BUT
REALLY HE IS TRYING TO RE-COLLECT
HIMSELF. AND IF HE GETS THE LAST OBJECT
IN THE COLLECTION, HE IS EFFECTIVELY
SIGNIFYING HIS OWN DEATH
JEAN BAUDRILLARD

Banerjee, S. (2006) *Corridor. A Graphic Novel* (Delhi: Penguin Books India, 7)

On this page from *Corridor*, (2006) Indian graphic novelist Sarnath Banerjee expresses the state of existential drift of his character, a comic book artist in search of "a seemingly innocent-looking object", the perfect pen and ink. These tools are essential for him and are very hard to find in the city where he lives: the artist's journey is portrayed almost like an epic descent into the *purgatorio* of urban Delhi.

Banerjee's protagonist literally falls into the centripetal force of the collector's ambition to first find, and then to possess, the coveted objects. Acquiring the pen is not an end in itself, though, since

the goal is to actually use the pen and ink to create comic book pages. (When found, the pen will remain unused: "What if I break the nib. The pen rots away along with several other objects, stashed in my red room, rare LPs of favourite musicians, who I cannot listen for the fear of damaging the records" (2006:3). This dilemma is indeed well known in comics.)

In Banerjee's single-panel page (a splash panel I suppose) a quotation by Jean Baudrillard from his essay "The System of Collecting" (1994:7-24) describes the state of constant flux of the collector, who becomes weightless in a universe of tangible objects. The caption containing Baudrillard's lines is not narrative, since it is in fact an extraneous quote which serves as an excuse to illustrate the merging of practice and theory, life and art in a comic book page. These lines of theory are noticeably *out of place* in a fictional comic book page, and yet they are literally both *mise en cadre* and *mise en page* (Samson and Peeters 2010; see also Bartual 2010). Furthermore, one cannot resist saying that in the most literal sense this *mise en page* is also a *mise en abyme*.

Banerjee's one-panel page is an interruption in *Corridor's* fictional narrative progress. The reader understands the action takes place in the realm of the imaginary (the theoretical in fact) and not the "reality" of the diegetic universe, in which the protagonist has set out to find his tools. Resembling the moment in which the walker stops or slows down to see him/herself reflected on a mirror or window, the page is a pause, a parenthesis, where the paper of the page, the page itself understood as a "technical unit" (Groensteen 2007) and the frame containing the images and words the reader sees work jointly as an exercise of media-specificity, where the book as fiction becomes an artist's sketchbook or journal.

The protagonist falls in this time-space continuum after getting lost amongst the streets and crowds of Delhi. The constant waves of vehicle and human traffic are intoxicating, and the journey (the descent) becomes a trip. The body of Banerjee's artist collector (the man in the crowd) suddenly finds himself drifting in space, apparently weightless (defying the gravity of the physical world), and yet falling in a whirlwind that includes books, records, boxing gloves, a flask, a boot, a film reel, a poster, a skateboard, an unplugged radio, a chess knight.

The purposeful *flânerie* of an author in search of his creative tools sets the physicality of the human body in ontological equivalence with other objects invested with a value (an aura?) recognisable by a community of collectors. The collector's "fall" is the subjection to a higher power (like gravity or magnetism), an expression of the drifting , fluctuating identity of people and things. In a world defined by uncertainty, collecting both enhances and offers the momentary relief of [self]preservation. It is as if Banerjee had wanted to redraw Benjamin's interpretation of Klee's Angelus Novus.

And indeed, "collectors are physiognomists in the world of objects," as Benjamin wrote in 1931 (1982:59-67). Collecting as the practice of "physiognomy" (from the Greek physis; 'nature', and gnomon; 'judge' or 'interpreter') implies then a conscious interpretive act which is physical in itself. It is

not only the amassing of commodities, but an integration of what Diana Taylor synthesised as "the place-thing-practice triad" (Taylor 2010).

It is through this triple process that comic book textuality is fleshed out; the triad causes "physiognomies" to be created and curated. This means that the collector does not simply accumulate objects but actually gives shape to his/her life and world through collecting, which implies an inherently selective process.

The triad between place, thing and practice exemplifies how in the realm of comics collecting becomes a textual matrix where the limits between the textual and the real of human activity are blurred. Collecting implies an awareness of the fragility of physical materiality. In the physicality of the collection, the collector participates in the ongoing construction of textuality, of comics textuality and of the collector's sense of self.

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David Boring – Daniel Clowes

By Greice Schneider

Clowes, D. (2000) *David Boring* (New York: Pantheon, 35)

In *Art and Illusion*, the historian of art Ernst Gombrich says that "a style, like a culture or climate of opinion, sets up a horizon of expectation, a mental set" (2002, 50). Daniel Clowes is well aware of that. The author is known for switching styles in order to play with conventions and expectations that are original from other genres, especially in his later works *Ice Haven* and *Wilson*.

This kind of play with styles already appears in Clowes' earlier works, like in this page from *David Boring*. But here this mechanism has significant differences. First, the change corresponds to a shift in focalization: the new style signals the introduction of a new *graphiator*—a term coined by Philippe Marion to refer to a graphic enunciator—and marks a new fictional territory: the embedded narrative in the comic book read by the protagonist. Besides, unlike what happens in *Wilson* and *Ice Haven*, the change doesn't happen from page to page, but within the same page, offering a tension between panels that obeys a completely different dynamics.

This is the second to last page of 'act one', as Clowes calls the first of three installments serialized in Eightball (and later published as a graphic novel). David, the protagonist, has discovered that his father was an obscure comic book writer and examines a copy of *Yellow Streak Annual* in search for more details about his dad. The combination between diegetic space and story-within-the-story invites the reader to a comparison induced by the simultaneity proper to a *tabular* reading of comics pages.

The first three panels of this page show more or less the same situation, but from different perspectives: David, the main character, reads a comic book in an empty cafe. The fourth panel introduces a different fictional dimension and creates a clash between two fictional worlds. We have, on the one hand, the uniform, monocromatic, silent and motionless situation in the comics that we are reading and, on the other hand, a colored, lively, tense and noisy condition on the comic book David is reading.

The clash between the two fictional worlds can be read in many levels: in the story level, this juxtaposition forces associations between characters and situations from both stories. In panel four, for example, we see a warning about a potential imminent "danger" that can be connected to the events in the next page, when David himself faces an attempt of murder (leaving the reader with a sadistic cliffhanger, but that's another story). In the same panel, a tower in a phallic shape is just one more sign of a mocking symbolism in the web of clues, anagrams and coincidences Clowes obsessively built all over the narrative. Basically, what happens in *Yellow Streak Annual* functions as a frame story to feed this puzzle.

But, besides that, what calls attention in this specific page is how it reflects some aspects of the history of the medium itself, reinforcing formal and content-wise differences between two traditions, namely that of "mainstream comics" and "alternative comics", or at least a caricature of what these two vague labels are assumed to be.

The first is composed by extraordinary worlds – worlds of fantasy inhabited by extremely active characters in comics driven by a highly immersive narrative dynamic, moving forward the expectations of the reader in order to keep the flow of the serialized production. Besides the type of story, Clowes also mimics the use of gestures, color palette, printing techniques (Ben-Day dots), and trace typical from a certain epoch and school.

The alternative comics, in their turn, usually address ordinary worlds. Nothing much happens in this page (although that doesn't apply to the whole book), the protagonist (whose surname, Boring, already suggests something) has a blasé attitude, gestures are used with parsimony, and David's facial expression could be interpreted as indifferent. The visual style here is basically composed by the very thin lines that Dan Clowes himself helped to spread, and that became recognizable as typical in many alternative comics.

WHAT ?
I'M SORRY, I'M A LITTLE DRUNK··· I DON'T MEAN TO INTERRUPT YOU IN THE MIDDLE OF YOUR STORY···
I'M A LOT DRUNK···
STILL, I'M VERY OPPOSED TO ALL FORMS OF NARRATIVE DISRUPTION, AND I DO APOLOGIZE···

Clowes, D. (2000) *David Boring* (New York: Pantheon, 36,1-2)

In the last panel, an older man says "I'm glad to see they're still teaching the classics" (2000: 35-6), just as a blink to the reader to add a bit of irony so typical of Clowes. This is followed by an equally revealing brief conversation, in the next page. The man apologizes to interrupt David in the middle of the story, because he's "very opposed to all forms of narrative disruption" (2000: 36-2). That statement reinforces one more contrast: while the "classics" should "avoid all forms of narrative disruption" or anything that could possibly threat reader engagement in the story, "alternative comics" are actually encouraged to blur the boundaries, and expected to kick "against the calcified limitations of the medium" (Hatfield, 2005, x). As a matter of fact, few things could be more disruptive for a fictional immersion than such abrupt change of style.

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Ghost World[s] and Non-Places

By Tony Venezia

YOU MADE ME RIDE TEN THOUSAND HOURS ON A BUS TO GO TO A STRIP MALL?
HUBBA HUBBA, THE ORIGINAL '50's DINER!
WANT THIS PLACE THE GREATEST EVER!?
HUBBI HUT
GOD, IT'S SO PATHETIC!
COULD THEY POSSIBLY BE MORE CLUELESS!? I'M SO HAPPY WE'RE HERE!
AT THE SOCK HOP?
OR THE CAR WASH?
THE CAR WASH?
WHATEVER.
HI! MY NAME IS ALLEN AND I'LL BE YOUR WAITER THIS AFTERNOON
HI AL!
OUR SPECIALS TODAY ARE:
CAN WE CALL YOU WEIRDO AL?

Clowes, D. (2008) *Ghost World* (Seattle: Fantagraphics, 39)

Welcome to ghost world: the temporal plane where high school friends Enid Coleslaw and Rebecca Doppelmeyer are caught, having finished high school, suspended in the moment between adolescence and adulthood. This extract is indicative of the episodic plotless drift of the narrative; a collection of virtually self-contained chapters connected by the characters and setting. We see Enid and Rebecca visit an 'Original '50's Diner' – a pastiche location drained of any sense of historicity . It is the category of the spatial that is surely the most intriguing and perhaps the most overlooked here. The 'ghost world' is also a term that recalls Marc Augé's notion of 'non-places', those transient homogenized contemporary urban and suburban spaces that Augé sees as a typical by-product of what he terms supermodernity. Such non-places are the result of the supermodern excess of time and space that sever meaningful connections with history and place:

> If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place.
> (Augé, 1995 pp. 77-78).

By mapping Augé's notion of non-places onto the grids of *Ghost World* we can get an idea of how such supermodern environments are represented via a medium particularly well suited to figuring spatial representations. Thierry Groensteen suggests intuitively that architectural metaphors are frequently invoked to describe what he calls 'the general economy of the [comics] page' stating, perhaps rather obviously, that: '[i]ndeed the page resembles a house that has several stories.' (2007, p.58). But I would suggest that the comics page also possesses a cartographic quality, mapping narrative space and place, the flattened regular rectilinear grids an analogue for the instrumentalised blocks of towns and cities.

At one point Enid tells Rebecca; 'This is so depressing...How everything is all the same no matter where you go.' (2008, p. 74). The non-places of *Ghost World*'s setting are located in an anonymous (sub)urban sprawl of fast food joints with ersatz décor and second-hand ambience, out of town shopping malls, and blank expanses of low rise blocks. Clowes manages to suggest a world invaded by franchises while cannily avoiding specific references (this ellipsis filled in by the reader from his/her own experiences and environment): non-places are not nowhere places – they are everywhere and interchangeable. This sense of interchangeability is underscored by Clowes' own comments on the anonymised setting of *Ghost World*: 'a vaguely suburban, half-Southern California, palm treed American sprawl (with various architectural touches from the Chicago of my youth).' (2008, 'Introduction', p. i). 'What reigns there', writes Augé 'is actuality, the urgency of the present moment.' (p. 104).

Clowes, D. (2008) *Ghost World: Special Edition* (Seattle: Fantagraphics, 79)

The characters wander aimlessly through a bland landscape of seemingly endless, blank low rise buildings, the smooth glossy surfaces of supermodern America punctured by the mysterious graffiti artist who paints 'Ghost World' on walls, garage doors, fences etc. Michel de Certeau, theorist of space and the everyday, proposed the categories of 'strategies' and 'tactics.' The strategy is 'the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships' that regulates social relations (de Certeau, p. 35-6). The tactic is that which 'must play on and with a terrain imposed on it' taking advantage of opportunities (1984, p. 37). The graffiti can be read as a tactic against the strategy of the non-places the girls inhabit., unsettling the rationalised cartographic grid of the comics page.

This environment, needless to say, affects them and their choices intensely. Their artfully contrived dialogue emphasises their attempts to construct some kind of critical distance from their environment and the banal mass of consumer choices on offer, a distance that fails to materialise (at least until the poetic conclusion), lapsing into an inadequate ironic insulation. The characters reach a point of indecision perplexed and unimpressed by the choices they face, with Enid about to go to university and Rebecca into the world of precarious employment. Enid's reaction against the blank consumer landscape is to buy a hearse as her first car to drive to college, an escape route from the somnambulant ghost world. Rebecca, meanwhile, ends up working in exactly the kind of non-place fast food outlet the girls used to aimlessly hang out.

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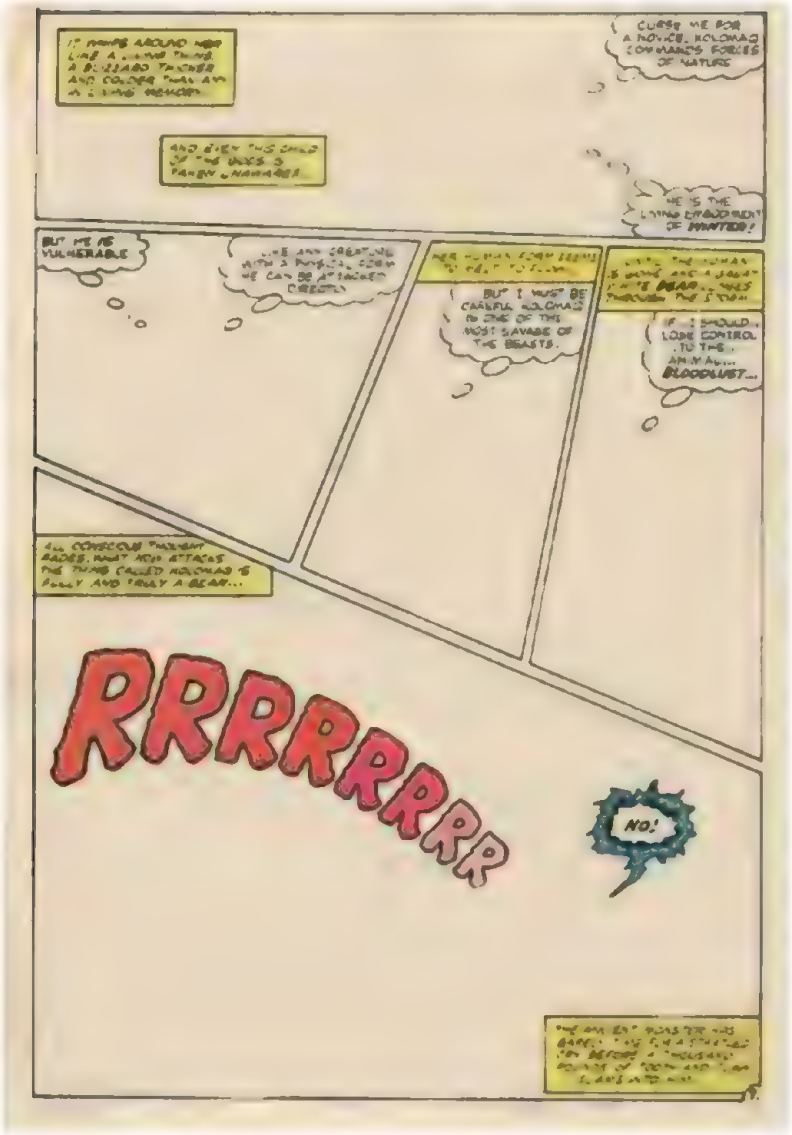
John Byrne's White on White

By Roberto Bartual



Byrne, J. (1984) *Alpha Flight #6* (p.9)

Back in 1983, somebody at the Marvel Comics offices had a good idea at last. A decision was made: the assistant editors would take charge of Marvel's most popular titles for one month while their bosses attended San Diego Comic-Con. The assistant editors took advantage of the fact that fanboys were prepared for all weird things in this one-month lapse in continuity and gave free rein to the artists. The results were uneven, of course, but Assistant Editors' Month produced some of the most untypical stories Marvel has ever published (for instance: *Amazing Spiderman*, #248,

cover date January 1984, where Roger Stern penned a bittersweet tale about an obsessive kid that collects every memento related with his hero). But it also produced some of the most innovative ones in formal terms.

We should credit John Byrne as the champion in this last category, especially if we take into account *Alpha Flight* #6, one of the two titles he wrote, drew and inked that month (cover date January 1984). The other title was *Fantastic Four* #262, (cover date January 1984) in which Mr. Byrne himself shows up in a trial against Reed Richards, acting as a witness for the defendant. The readers would eventually get used to Byrne's metafictional whims when, some years later, maybe inspired by Steve Gerber's *Howard the Duck*, he turned She-Hulk into (as far as I know) the first superhero character that was totally aware of the presence of the reader. In 1983, however, this kind of gimmicks were quite unsusual.

Byrne went as far as to print five blank pages in *Alpha Flight* #6, an issue that was very conveniently titled "Snowblind" (he would repeat the same proposal in *Sensational She-Hulk* #37 (cover date March 1992), with the result of She-Hulk yelling at Byrne and warning him it was not the first time he did the same thing) . In the case of "Snowblind", the pages are not completely blank; they have panels, captions, thought balloons and onomatopoeias. Byrne just didn't take the trouble to draw the content of the panels.

Malevich, K. (1918) *White on White* (New York: MOMA)

But the fact that the panels don't contain drawings does not mean they don't contain an image. The reason they are blank is easy to explain: in the previous page, the ancient monster Kolomaq summoned a snowstorm to avoid the attack of Snowbird, a member of Alpha Flight, Canada's foremost superhero ensemble. The blank content of the panels are an image of the storm; its thickness and Snowbird's blindness being represented by the use of pure white. It's impossible not to think about Kasimir Malevich, here; but Byrne's use of white is quite different from the Russian suprematist painter's, since there's no abstraction in Byrne's page: the representational properties of the color remain intact, as they are used in a very effective manner for the sake of narration.

In a common comic page, composition is a key element, but not the only one, to manipulate rhythm and produce an impression of movement, since it affects the way the reader perceives the graphic content of the panels. However, movement is completely dependent on composition and panel shapes in this particular page, since these are the only graphic devices Byrne uses to suggest

what's happening behind the snow. We know from the previous page that Snowbird is flying. She is a shape-shifter and the fourth panel's caption informs us that she is changing into bear form to attack the monster Kolomaq. Her progressive body change takes place in panels two, three and four, which are arranged along a diagonal downward direction, as if they were following Snowbird's descent. They tell us what the text does not: that Snowbird is flying back to the ground, something she must definitely do if she wants to avoid falling, since bears cannot usually sustain themselves in the air (at least in Canada).

Byrne's gimmick in *Alpha Flight* for Assistant Editors' Month is certainly mischievous; he was probably thinking not so much about pushing the language of comics into a new direction, but about saving himself a lot of work without being paid one penny less: a cheeky but ingenious answer to the chain-production system he was into. That is the reason why it is so easy to feel a lot of sympathy for Byrne's gimmick. If Malevich had ever recognized that even in the field of the abstraction every formal decision may also have simple pragmatic purposes, it would be much easier to feel sympathy for him too. At least if he recognized that laziness is a pragmatic purpose too.

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Stern, R., Romita, Jr., J. and Frenz, R. (1984) *Amazing Spiderman #248* (New York: Marvel Comics)

This text is dedicated to Juanfer "Scari Wo" García, master of comics, who revealed to me John Byrne's suprematist aspirations.

You can find more information about pictureless comics in Matt Madden and Jessica Abel's *Drawing Words Writing Pictures*, as well as complete guidelines for using pictureless comics for teaching.

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Marjane Satrapi's Elaborate Simplicity

By Esther Claudio

Persepolis is Marjane Satrapi's autobiography. It covers her childhood and teenage years in her hometwon, Tehran; her experiences abroad while she studies at the French Lyceum in Austria; and her return to a country devastated by war and mistreated by the Regime.

Therefore it is hardly surprising that the protagonist's identity is formed at the crossroads of two cultures, the Western and the Eastern ones, without really belonging to either of them. Satrapi herself has stated that "[she is] a foreigner in Iran... Nowhere is [her] home any more" (Tully, 2004) and this feeling of alienation is materialised throughout the work.

Thus, *Persepolis* revels in the middle-grounds between opposite stances, with images which are able to show the complexity both of the situation in her country and of the author's personal life. One of the richest and most representative images may be this one:

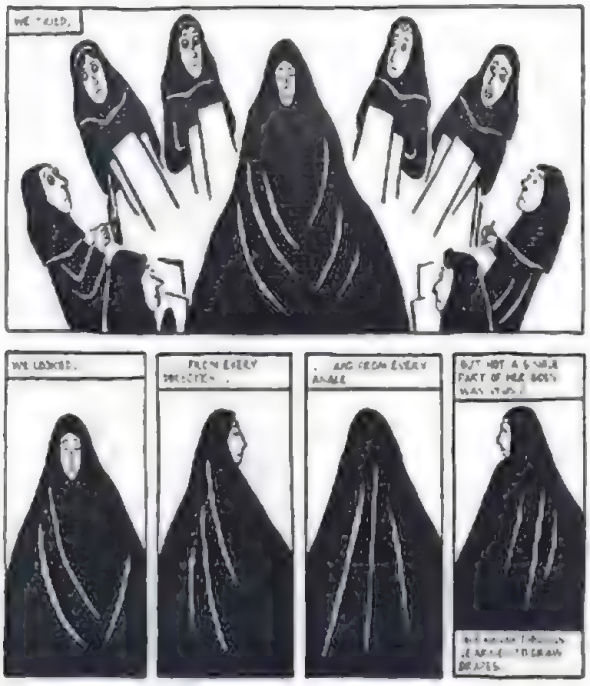
Satrapi, M. (2006) *Persepolis* (London: Jonathan Cape, 283, 3)

This image shows the picture that she had to draw to pass the exam for university, where she would study fine arts. She knew that, in the wake of Iran-Iraq war, when propaganda was overwhelming and 40% of places were reserved for martyrs' and handicapped people's children, one of the exam topics would be the martyrs' representation. This image constitutes an interesting re-interpretation of both Christian and Muslim religious symbology. Thus, we can read, in the text box above, that:

I practiced by copying a photo of Michelangelo's *"La Pietà"* about twenty times. On that day, I reproduced it by putting a black chador on Mary's head, an army uniform on Jesus, and then I added two tulips, symbols of the martyrs, on either side so there would be no confusion.

But there is, of course, considerable "confusion" here. Satrapi alludes to the tradition of *"La Pietà"* to subvert the politically correct forms required by examiners by incorporating a Christian archetype of compassion and suffering with a nationalist Iranian composition. Simultaneously, she is stressing or commenting that the tendency to glorify martyrdom and suffering in propaganda is not a strategy exclusively used by Muslims or Iranians and that also Christians and Westerners have glorified it throughout History.

Additionally, Satrapi subverts the tendency of westerners to dehumanize veiled women as if they were massive undistinguished figures, mere statues, like this model:



Satrapi, M. (2006) *Persepolis* (London: Jonathan Cape, 301, 3-7)

In these panels, Satrapi draws herself with her friends around the veiled model – the archetype of the silenced Muslim woman that the Regime provides to be copied not only on their canvases, but also in their lives as women. However, this model is also the stereotype of the Muslim woman which has spread in the West.[1]

In contrast, we see Marjane and her mates looking at the woman in the chador with discontent; and in the next page, we learn the subversion tactics that many Iranian women from her generation employed after the revolution ("showing your wrist, a loud laugh, having a walkman"...).

The contrast between the woman in a chador and the women like Marjane and her mates highlights the difference between the image projected of the Eastern woman both by the Regime and by

1 As post-colonial feminists have stated, western feminism has set up as the paradigm of modernity, thus creating a stereotype of non-western women as a homogeneus block of passive, traditional women in the margins of progress. One of the most influential post-colonial feminists, Chandra Mohanty, states that western feminism "colonize[s] the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing/re-presenting a composite, singular 'Third World Woman'—an image which appears arbitrarily constructed, but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of Western humanist discourse." Thus, she argues "that assumptions of privilege and ethnocentric universality on the one hand, and inadequate self-consciousness about the effect of Western scholarship on the 'third world' in the context of a world system dominated by the West on the other, characterize a sizable extent of Western feminist work on women in the third world." ("Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses". Feminist Review, N° 30, Autumn 1988, 61-88).

Satrapi, M. (2006) *Persepolis* (London: Jonathan Cape, 304, 3-7)

the West. In *Persepolis*, pictures of veiled women reject the stereotype of the Muslim voiceless woman. Instead, Satrapi's female figures are human and full of character and individualism, even in veil.

As she herself has stated in an interview with Annie Tully: "the book *Persepolis* I wrote it for the other ones, not for Iranians" (2004) and it questions the image of the western woman as the paradigm of modern femininity, educated and liberated. In this way, Marjane Satrapi's style dwells on the contrast, on the contradictions which problematise reality through an apparently naïve and simple drawing and narration.

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A Face in the Mind

By Jacques Samson

Ware, C. (2007) *The ACME Novelty Library* #18 (Chicago: Acme, 32)

The young woman in this story is nameless. This is a deliberate decision by Chris Ware as the world his female character lives in is banal (*'Whatever sort of stupid life* ***that*** *is...'*). What's the use of a name if it doesn't help to tell her apart from others? She is anonymous but she is also unlike most other girls her age: the lower half of her left leg has been amputated, which does not make things easier.

Her anonymity, though initially disconcerting, is quite convenient in the long run. It permits us a certain distance as we slide into her thoughts without too much difficulty. This is the first thing that

draws attention when reading the page. We follow her at work in a flower shop, where she apparently does not exchange a single word with anybody and is completely immersed in her thoughts. A beautiful paradox! On closer inspection the events depicted on the page reveal that the author has 'rigged' the scene.

In panels six and eight it is unlikely that she did not utter any word given the gestures she makes (returning change to the customer, addressing her workmate). Ware, it seems, has discretely muted the soundtrack. But not completely. The reader can still 'hear' the young disabled woman's inner monologue[1]. It is the author's privilege to portray her expression in any way he deems fit. But why should he select this specific approach?

One reason could be to show that comics have the power to depict the dissociation of thought and action. But is this really a straightforward case of dissociation? The events take place within a homogeneous time-frame, but that frame does not include the reminiscences of the thought balloons. Ware does not use parallel montage to show the protagonist's actions on one hand and the materialisation of memory on the other: in this case, her life with the young man whose features she is able to remember without quite recalling his face.

This is another paradox: visual memories that lack a 'figurative' aspect. The young woman's thoughts are comprised of words, the images they evoke do not seem any more accessible to her than to the reader – unless the reader uses their own imagination to give them life... On this page, the visible conceals a world that cannot be accessed anymore. The author's manipulation does not only concern sound. Hence the image of the young man, face turned away from the reader, as suggested in the title.

Although we have no direct access to the character's consciousness, we are able to access her non-figurative thoughts because they are written. The young woman joins a literary workshop and reflects on a writing exercise, based on recollections, which explains the purely linguistic aspect of remembrance. As we have no access to the visual aspect of her memories, there is dissociation. What Ware is showing here is how comics are able to represent temporal nuances, *just as language does with verbal tenses.*

Ware has frequently spoken of his preference for a more subtle expression of time, where "that particular part of the story have more of a past tense feel and less of an immediate quality" (Groth, 161: 2003). His achievement is a tour de force, as this eloquent page attests, in its evocation of a past that is finished yet constantly re-emerging into a present in which the lack of personal achievement is barely endured. In other words, something of the felt incompleteness –akin the perfect progressive tense– of a gloomy life.

1 The choice of thought balloons is very surprising here, because Ware usually represents interior monologue in italic type directly printed into the images.

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The original French version of this text first appeared in Samson, Jacques, and Peeters, Benoît (2010) Chris Ware: La Bande Dessinée Réinventée (Brussels and Paris: Les Impressions Nouvelles).

English translation by Roberto Bartual for *The Comics Grid.*

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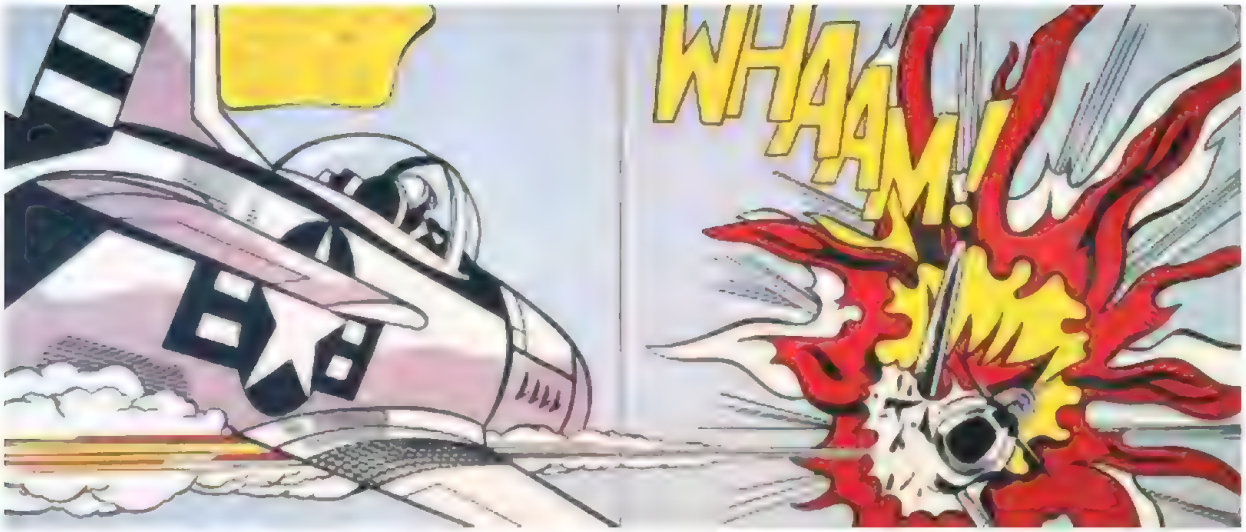
Whaam! Becoming a Flaming Star

by Ernesto Priego

ALL-AMERICAN MEN OF WAR
SUDDENLY, THEY'D STREAKED PAST THE BULLET-NOSE OF MY SHINING SHIP...
ROCKETS!
WHOOOSH!
WHOOOSH!
WHOOSH!
WHOOSH!
L.T. JOHN CLOUD
THERE WAS ONLY ONE DIRECTION THE DEADLY "ROMAN CANDLES" OF EXPLOSIVES COULD HAVE COME FROM...
I CAN'T CLIMB OUT OF THEIR SIGHTS!
THE STICK FELT AS SENSITIVE AS A JEWELER'S SCALES...
I'LL DIVE INTO THEM!
I FELT AS IF I WERE RIDING A SMOOTHING STAR WHICH SLICED THROUGH THE SKY...
I'LL RISK A HIT TO GIVE ONE!
I PRESSED THE FIRE CONTROL...AND AHEAD OF ME... ROCKETS BLAZED THROUGH THE SKY.
THE ENEMY HAS BECOME A FLAMING STAR!
WHAAM!
WHOOSH!

Kanigher, R. (script) & Novick, I. (pencils & inks), "The Star Jockey", *All American Men of War* 89, 1962, page 21



Lichtenstein, R. *"Whaam!"*, 1963, Acrylic and oil on canvas support: painting: 1727 x 4064 mm, frame: 1747 x 4084 x 60 mm. Tate Modern London, purchased 1966 © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein

In the words of Art Spiegelman, "Lichtenstein did no more or less for comics than Andy Warhol did for soup" (Sanderson 2007). Several comics readers will agree, but is this the perception of the average museum goer? What implications can be unveiled from a culture that values Lichtenstein's appropriations as paradigmatic examples of pop culture, and still denies most serious artistic recognition to specific comic book artists?

The Tate Modern gallery's display caption for Lichtenstein's world-famous *'Whaam!'* indicates that the painting "is based on an image from *'All American Men of War'* published by DC comics in 1962."

The caption does not mention the name of the artist and writer of the original image, nor discusses how similar or dissimilar the original source is to Lichtenstein's interpretation. To be fair, the original publication, with a cover date of January-February 1962, did not display the corresponding credits, neither in their legal page or in the first page of the story to which the panel belongs (that issue contained three different stories).

The subtext of Tate's caption is that whilst Lichtenstein was an artist (a fine artist), the penciller and inker of the original comic book image, Irv Novick (1916-2004) was not. The caption concludes:

Although he was careful to retain the character of his source, Lichtenstein also explored the formal qualities of commercial imagery and techniques. In these works as in *'Whaam!'*, he adapted and developed the original composition to produce an intensely stylised painting.

The caption itself does not show (or refer or link to, online) to Lichtenstein's "source", so those who do not know it cannot really evaluate what is it that Lichtenstein exactly did. It is only by direct comparison, side to side, that the reader/museum-goer can judge if, in fact, Lichtenstein's painting is "intensely stylised" whilst the original (the last panel in a page with five) is not.

Lichtenstein's "adaptation" and "development" of the original panel is dated only a year after the comic book was published: unlike retro fetishisation, which normally functions by appropriating iconography which has fallen in disuse, Lichtenstein's work was contemporary to the original.

Besides embodying the cultural prejudice against comic books as vehicles of art, examples like Lichtenstein's appropriation of the vocabulary of comics highlight the importance of taking publication format in consideration when defining comics, as well as the political economy implied by specific types of historical publications, in this case the American mainstream comic book. To what extent was National Periodical Publications (later DC) responsible for the rejection of the roles of Kanigher and Novick as artists in their own right by not granting them full authorial credit on the publication itself?

Stripped from its narrative context, Lichtenstein's image embodies the tautology of the signifier (Baudrillard 1981) in a similar way than a film still is isolated from a cinematographic work. The dynamism of the original page (21 in the comic book), representing the fluid, fast circular motion of the plane throughout four quadrangular panels of equal size, and bursting into a larger final rectangular panel when the enemy jet is hit, is lost.

The climactic strength of the last panel is indebted to the rhythmic structure of the whole grid, and this is absent from the Lichtenstein. Generally speaking, the cultural recognition that Lichtenstein enjoys is unavoidably contrasting with the lack of appreciation of comic book art, but more importantly it underscores a cultural preference for the directness of the unique image over the multiplicity of the graphic narrative layout.

Only in the most superficial sense Lichtenstein's painting does transmit almost the exact same information as Novick's panel, but it is significant it leaves out the speech balloon. In it, the jet pilot, amazed at his power of destruction, utters "the enemy has become a flaming star!", an elegiac line that in itself is not unpoetical ("O powerful western fallen star!" Whitman wrote).

It will be obvious for most, but it might be worth to say again that Lichtenstein's rendition is not a comic; it is not even a comics panel. Its meaning is solely referential and post hoc. In any case, *'Whaam!'s* aesthetic or semiotic 'value' is fully dependent on its ability to refer the viewer to a particular type of story and discourse, conveyed by a particular type of publication, meaning as well a particular type of paper and printing technique ("cheap paper, cheap printing and four-color separations"). By choosing the onomatopoeia ('whaam!') over the articulated, metaphoric utterance ("the enemy has become a flaming star!"), Lichtenstein's painting reduces the discourse of comics to little more than a guttural growl.

It's not a nostalgia for the value of the unrecognised original what should guide a critical reappraisal of the cultural value of the hypotext of Lichtenstein's work (Genette 1997: 52). Nevertheless, by stripping the comics panel from its narrative context, *'Whaam!'* is representative in the realm of fine art of the preference of the image-icon over image-narrative. Paradoxically, Lichtenstein's

semi-literal translation (Benjamin 1969) has canonised a single panel from a comic book that perhaps no one would have remembered otherwise in the context of great art.

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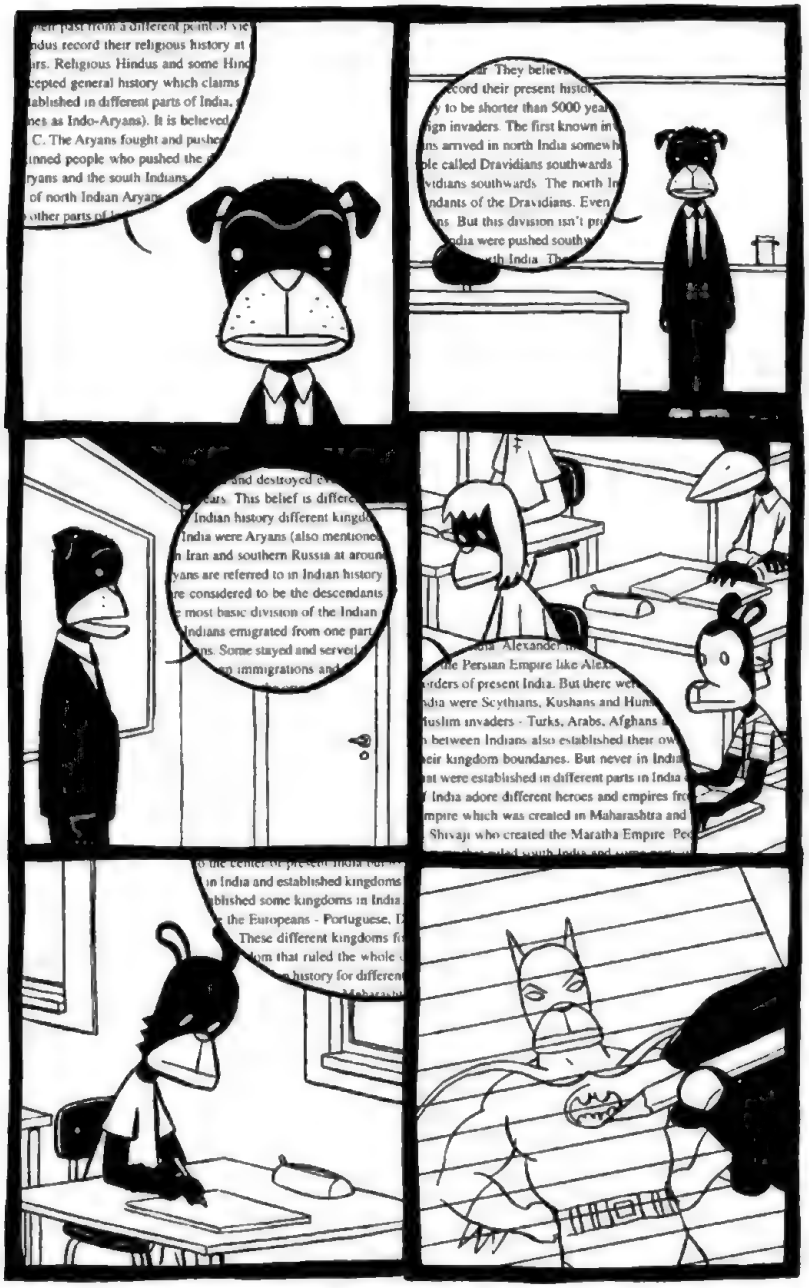
Hey, Wait... Jason

by Greice Schneider



Jason (2001) *Hey, Wait...* (Seattle: Fantagraphics) (no pagination)

Hey, Wait... was Norwegian cartoonist Jason's first book published in English (2001). It is organized around an isolated tragic event that will resonate, by contrast, with the banality of everyday episodes found throughout the book and the protagonist's life.

Hey, Wait... presents a varied collection of strategies which help express emptiness and lack of meaning; the metaphorical use of silences and visual minimalism are two of these, and will become frequent in the author's repertory in the following books. Meaninglessness, though, can also be expressed by adopting an aesthetics of visual excess (since both lack and overload can be equally menacing to the production of meaning). In this specific page, this is done at a typographical level.

As a general norm, lettering in comics tends to avoid the mechanical typographic effect presenting, rather, something closer to the gesture of drawing (even if it is mechanically generated to emulate human trace). This happens because it is precisely the unstable dynamics and random vibration of the trace that, according to Philip Marion, would function as the "voice", the fragility that would charge the drawing with its expressive force (1993: 55).

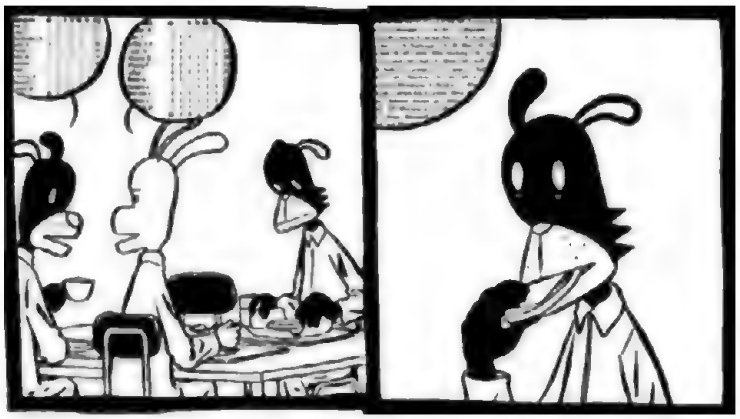
At the same time, lettering in comics also normally seeks to emulate some form of standardization for the sake of readability and narrative homogeneity (even if in manuscript form). The tension between these two effects (manuscript and typography) would be manipulated and dosed according to the desired level of proximity with the reader (Marion, 1993: 57), among other things.

There are situations in which the preference for a purely mechanical typography can be used with expressive goals, as a strategy to achieve a specific effect: colours, typefaces, letter spacing, width, shapes, etc. can be used to suggest personality variations, change in moods, volume, pitch, nationality and so on. And that's the case here.

The situation presented, as in most of the pages from this book, is very ordinary: a classroom, a teacher and students. The text inside the balloons, though, is nothing like what we usually expect from a speech balloon, a space conventionally reserved to oral language. First, the extreme regularity of mechanically reproduced letters is very similar to a textbook regarding the choice of fonts (serified), size (small), layout (crowded). Besides, there are no margins: the balloons are densely occupied by words, with no space for "breathing".

The standardization of typography and regularity of the layout only reinforces the feeling of monotony experienced by the students (who prefer, for example, to draw Batman as a form of distraction). The discrepancy between text layout and balloon and the visual similarities with the printed book signal a distance from oral discourse, hinting to a not so engaging oratory by the professor.

Although we can still have an idea of the subject (something related to Indian history), readability is highly compromised: what is offered to the reader are not completed sentences, but fragments, chopped sentences, as in a collage from a book. From that point of view, the chunks of words occupy predominantly an iconic function rather than a linguistic one.



Jason (2001) *Hey, Wait...* (Seattle: Fantagraphics) (no pagination)

Later in the book, Jason employs the same resource to show a conversation between colleagues in the factory. This time, the text layout emulates another printed form – a newspaper column of baseball scores and statistics. The words inside the balloon, of course, do not correspond to the words pronounced by the characters. Again, readability is compromised and words are so tiny they are barely recognizable, but the layout, on the contrary, is very familiar, and brings enough information about the conversation's possible content (and how conventional and based on clichés it is). Match results are just another excuse for making up conversation, as trivial as weather forecasts.

What happens in these two examples is that the visual organization of text inside the balloons destabilizes reading expectations of comics form by borrowing conventions from other printing design formats. In these balloons, the usual illusion of an oral discourse – disguised by a human trace – is replaced by purely mechanical text and saturated design, calling attention to the materiality of printing.

The reader is left with two options: either ignore the verbal text, interpreting the group of words as a recognizable layout (and this sounds the most reasonable one), or try to read it, but, in that case, the immersive game of fiction would be disturbed, promoting disengagement, and defying readers' patience and attention, just like the students' in the classroom.

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Seth's Suspension of Perception in *Palookaville* #19

by Kathleen Dunley

Jonathan Crary's 2001 work, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* offers comic scholars a unique tool for understanding the often slow paced and subtle comics of Canadian cartoonist, Seth. Frequently misread as nostalgic, delving into the nature of attention presents readers with a new lens for considering Seth's sequences, especially the oft-derided conclusion of *Palookaville* #19.

In his study on attention, Jonathan Crary argues that modern attention is tied in with how one views the past:

> [M]odern attention will coincide with an individual evasion of both history and memory. Habitual and commodified, it becomes an imaginary deletion of all that is unbearable or intolerable in collective and individual experience (2001: 361).

Here, Crary argues that the modern viewer will choose to "delete" any "unbearable" experiences, especially those relating to the past. This sort of edited attention is exactly what Seth tries to ***avoid*** in *Clyde Fans*, which often directs the reader's attention toward objects and sites that imply a sense of failure. In so doing, Seth succeeds in creating a sense of "suspended temporality," defined by Crary as "a looking or listening so rapt that it becomes an exemption from ordinary conditions... a hovering out of time" (2001: 10). This hovering enables a viewer to hold something in "wonder or contemplation," and conversely, could be viewed as "a cancellation or an interruption" (10).

Seth (2008) *Palookaville #19* (Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 90:4-15)

Suspension's dual pull is important for Seth's work encompasses this dialectic. It encourages ***contemplation*** by using his characters' gaze to focus reflections on the past. His work also encourages ***interruption*** as his most poignant sequences are silent, breaking the narrative pattern and forcing the reader to fill in his or her own reading of a given scene.

Thus, to use Crary's terms, Seth succeeds in creating a sense of perception "that can be both an absorption *and* an absence or deferral" (2001: 10). The ***absorption*** encourages meditation on the past, while the sense of ***deferral*** refers primarily to the gaps left in his narrative. By focusing the reader's attention, especially on particular objects,

Seth succeeds in constructing his illustrations in such a way that trains the viewer to meditate on the objects from the past that are intrinsic to his stories.

The dual pull between contemplation and interruption becomes clear at end of *Palookaville* #19, which comprises part of the *Clyde Fans* serial. At this point in the story, the man depicted (Simon Matchcard) had just seen his mother, a woman suffering from dementia, sent to a nursing home. The last six pages of the comic are dedicated to a tour, or inventory, of the mother's room, mostly focusing on the dresser and odd objects that catch the character's eye.

Reviewers, including the popular blog site PopMatters, called this sequence indulgent, annoying, and described it as padding (Gatevackes 2008). Such reviews missed the mark here as this process shows Simon's own desire to find out (and recall) as much as he can about his lost mother. The pacing is notable. The panel set-up repeats a key pattern as items are set up, and then pauses or interruptions frame them as unique in space.

This directs the reader's attention and provides gaps meant to slow down the visual flow and focus attention, which contextualizes the idea of suspension... "a looking or listening so rapt that it becomes an exemption from ordinary conditions... a hovering out of time" (Crary 2001:10) This hovering enables a viewer to hold something in "wonder or contemplation" (Crary 2001:10).

As Simon moves through the bottles, he trails into his own contemplation as he does not know why his mother would have kept them, also showing the absence that persists as his own memories of these objects do not begin to grasp their meaning.

The set-up leads to two moments of silence/interruptions. One literal as the character's gaze moves towards the vanity, and one visual as the scene fades to black

The result of the silence is a framing and eventual exposition of the object, initially described objectively, but later trailing into contemplation ("I wonder...").

Seth (2008) *Palookaville #19* (Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 90:6-9)

The scene continues through four more pages. It is lengthy, but repeats a key visual pattern wherein especially important items are zoomed into and focused on for multiple panels. These include a brush with the Egyptian motif that was out of style even when it was first produced (Seth 2008:91), and the broken vase that was too precious to discard, even though it was no longer functional (Seth 2008:94).

Disturbing objects like the box of tubes (Seth 2008:91), the garish diamond ring (Seth 2008:92), and the kitschy Eskimo figurines (Seth 2008:93) receive less treatment. The panels are the lens that guides our eye across these items. The emphasis, or lack thereof, helps the reader to see what Simon knows best, but also presents the gaps... why were some (like the box of tubes and bulbs) dismissed so quickly? Why were others (the doe-eyed paintings) handled with such care? The questions reflect back to Simon's own questioning mindset, creating, once again, a sense of suspension between both past and present and between what we are allowed to cull from the depicted items.

ALL THIS IS BUT THE TIP OF AN ICEBERG— THE MERE SURFACE OF THE ROOM.
I COULD GO DEEPER— ZOOM IN EVEN CLOSER.
IT MIGHT BE WORTHWHILE TO STUDY THE SHAPE OF EACH OBJECT... WHAT FEELINGS THEY EVOKE.
OR THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THEM JUST WHERE THEY HAVE BEEN PLACED AND WHAT THAT MEANS.
THE LAYERS OF PAINT ON THE WALLS OR THE CURVE OF THE MATTRESS.
THE MARKS ON THE FLOOR WHERE A DRESSER STOOD FOR A DECADE BEFORE TAKING UP ITS NEW POST AGAINST THE OPPOSITE WALL.
A LIFETIME COULD BE SPENT STUDYING THE SUBTLETIES OF THIS SIMPLE ROOM
HOPING TO DISCERN JUST WHAT IS SAID BY THESE RANDOM CHOICES AND MUNDANE ITEMS

Seth (2008) *Palookaville #19* (Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 95:1-8)

As the sequence comes to an end, the panels fade to black. With the visual flow suddenly cut off, the words become the only guide for interpreting the overall scene. The reader sees the objects, in the end, as locks without keys. An archivist might appraise many incorrectly, and indeed, there are ways to view the pieces that could review different meanings. This may lead the reader to think back to the earlier pages and view them out of order, or perhaps in an alternative order; a reading process that is permitted in a sense, due to the set-up of the pages. One could read a single black box at a time, using them as the stop/start points since the content itself need not be read sequentially. It is a collection of objects... important objects, as the next panels show:

Seth (2008) *Palookaville #19* (Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 95:9-14)

Are six panels needed here? Perhaps not. What they do, however, is visually slow down the previous scenes. As the moment-to-moment pacing slows down the reader, his or her eyes are left to focus on the verbiage, and the last line stands out as Simon moves his gaze from the reader's view. The pages that preceded were, in effect, an act of mourning.

Seth's *Palookaville* #19 is demanding. It requires the reader to negotiate the space of memory, and can be too easy to dismiss due to this challenge. Stopping to look between the lines is rewarding, resulting in a suspension of perception that not only helps connect with the character, but also share in his grief.

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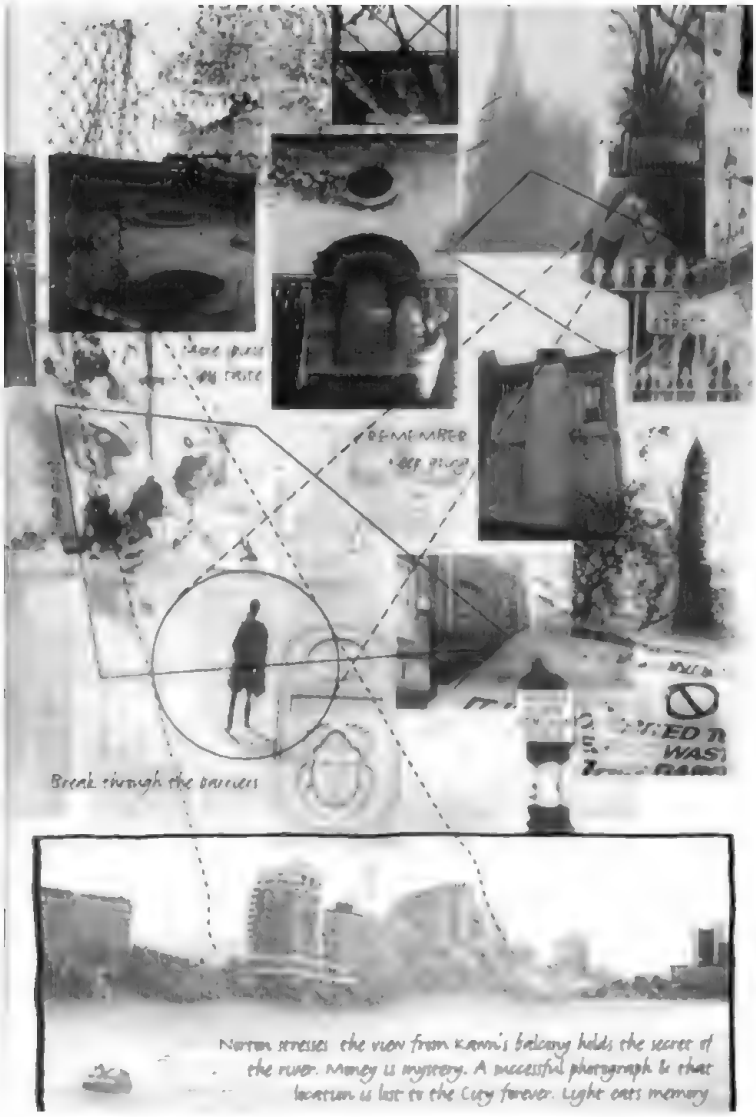
Seth. (2008) *Palookaville #19* (Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly)

Edited City: London Passagenwerk

by Tony Venezia

"Being a London writer is more like being a London editor."
–Iain Sinclair (2011)[1]


Break through the barriers
Norton stresses the view from Kamni's balcony holds the secret of the river. Money is mystery. A successful photograph is that location is lost to the City forever. Light eats memory

Sinclair, I. and McKean, D. (1997) *Slow Chocolate Autopsy: Incidents from the notorious career of Norton, prisoner of London* (London: Phoenix p.87)

Slow Chocolate Autopsy, a collaboration between writer/film-maker/psychogeographer Iain Sinclair and artist Dave McKean (whose work perhaps owes more to graphic design than

1 In conversation with Iain Boal, Orbiting London, 21 March 2011, Birkbeck, University of London.

conventional cartooning) is that rarest of chimerical beasts; a genuine graphic novel. It is also an artefact that questions and problematises its own status as such.

This alchemical hybrid may raise doubts from some regular readers of the Grid as to whether it is even a comic, but the collaborative chapters with McKean, coyly referred to as 'graphic stories' in the contents, would pass the test of any canonical definition. The novel presents Sinclair and McKean's account of Andrew Norton, prisoner of London – trapped in space but not in time. The extracts I'm looking at are taken from chapter vi, *'The Griffin's Egg'*, following Turner, a photographer, who is tracking the mysterious Norton across the capital. The page manages to simultaneously look and not look like a comic.

> ***com.ics (kom'iks) n.*** Plural in form, used with singular verb. 1. Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce and aesthetic response in the viewer.
> (McCloud 1993: 9)
>
> The format of the comic book presents a montage of both word and image, and the reader is thus required to exercise both visual and verbal interpretative skills.
> (Eisner 1990: 8)

The page maps a series of snapshots of London buildings, streets signs; a cluster of words that act as opaque narration; spectral markings and lines that possibly mark out connections. Dig deeper, and we can see the city Sinclair and McKean map: Hawksmoor churches (a *leitmotif* in Sinclair's work), East London streets, the Thameside developments. A passing mention to Kawn is decoded as a reference to disgraced Tory peer Jeffrey Archer.

The visual/textual clash presents a writhing vision on which the various distinctions that typically distinguish the comics page collapse into each other, embodying Charles Hatfield's contention that comics are characterised by formal codes of tension (word/image; single image/image-in-series; sequence/surface; reading as experience/text as material object, 32-67).

The foregrounding of montage-as-method, the showing of the joins as it were, reveals the tensions Hatfield proposes exist in any comic and problematises the distinctions we take for granted. Word collapses into image, sequence and surface are disrupted, the confusion of the page both suggests itself as a single unit but fractures into component shards, the experience of reading this text inextricably tied to the materiality of the book. Most importantly, the chapter emphasises visuality by making Turner a photographer whose plotting of a quest for Norton weaves through the serpentine assemblage of image and text that constitute the book, a network of composite elements that requires active engagement to interpret.

> We continue to distinguish between the function of words and the function of images, despite the fact that comics continually work to destabilise this very distinction.
> (Hatfield 2005: 37)

On purely stylistic terms, this match (or mis-match?) of writer and text, and artist and image, is perfectly judged. McKean's collage assemblages of manipulated photographs, typographic excess and drawn pictures evoke the practices and objects of the Surrealists[2]. Sinclair's utterly idiosyncratic and fluid text, an amalgam of key influences from the Decadents to the pulps to the Beats (an unholy stylistic union of Lovecaft and Ginsberg, preceded over by Machen), possesses an uncanny visual quality.

This is no doubt partly the result of his concern with material spaces and the imprint of their histories; the affective resonances of place so effectively mined by psychogeography, that pleasingly vague term to misquote Debord (5). His writing also carries a very visual charge – it should come as no surprise that Sinclair has collaborated with photographer Marc Atkins and film-maker Chris Petit to produce different kinds of imagetexts[3].

'Light eats memory' writes Sinclair, reminding us of the forgotten stories of the city lost to gentrification and development. What is of interest here is the material layout, a constellation of images and words that spark a recognition of occulted histories.

> ...mapping the city along the contours of hidden narratives and oppositional currents.
> (Laura Oldfield Ford interviewed by Berry Slater and Iles 2009)

This method, as Walter Benjamin, that chronicler of polytemporal pockets of urban space, would have recognized, is montage. The monumental Arcades Project was Benjamin's attempt to fashion a cultural history of the spaces of consumption in the arcades and magasins de nouveautés in nineteenth century Paris. Commonly seen as a non-linear hypertext avant la lettre, the unfinished Passagenwerk provides a vividly enacted example of Benjamin's historical method with its emphasis on collage and citation, collection and residues.

> This work has to develop to the highest degree the art of citing without quotation marks. Its theory is intimately related to that of montage.
> (Benjamin 1990: N1, 10)

This second extract is a clipped citation from the following page and further underlines these points on method – two panels, middle of the page, more conventionally identifiable as comics. The two panels seem to exemplify McCloud's transition-as-non-sequitur – the faded gravestone alongside the blurred image of a building (in fact the headquarters of MI5, part of the British Secret Service, on the banks of the Thames at Vauxhall; a fact that further underlines the thematics of vision and surveillance).

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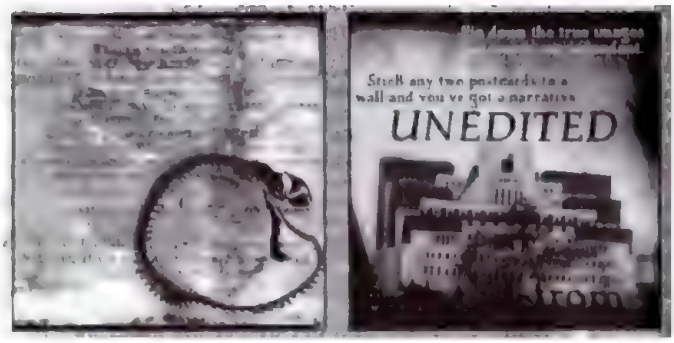
2 The fascination with collaging the city finds a contemporary companion in the work of Oldfield Ford's fanzine, *Savage Messiah*.

3 See *Liquid City* (1999) (London: Reaktion) for the former, and *The Cardinal and the Corpse* (1992), *The Falconer* (1997), and *Asylum* (2000), as well as an adaption of Sinclair's book *London Orbital* (2002), for the latter. Stewart Home has written on Sinclair and Petit's "strangely convoluted trilogy".



Sinclair, I. and McKean, D. (1997)
Slow Chocolate Autopsy (London: Phoenix p.88)

The text leads the reader: 'Stick any two postcards to a wall and you've got a narrative.' Stick any two panels together and you get much the same. In bold – **UNEDITED**. A disingenous remark: the city may well be unedited, but the text is not despite gesturing toward the aleatory.

Instead of establishing causal connections, this comics montage rearranges and juxtaposes dialectical image and text producing profane illumination, allowing Sinclair and McKean to re-present a historiographical vision of history that Benjamin would have recognised as related to his own methods and subjects.

Dedicated to Henderson Downing: Psychogeographer, Bloomsbury and Banbury.

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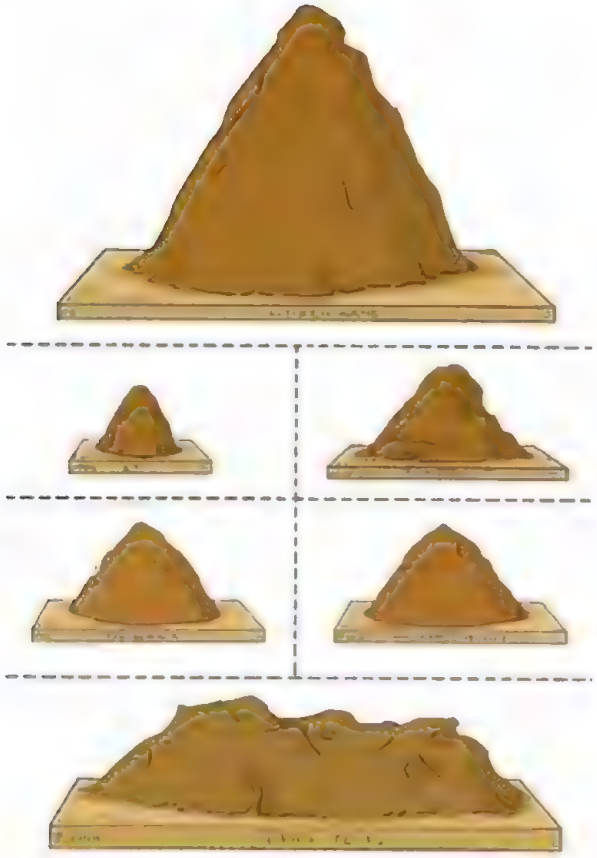
Creation versus interpretation in *To Boil a Bear*

by Roberto Bartual



Millán, J. and Noguera, M. (2010) *Hervir un Oso* (Bilbao: Belleza Infinita) (no pagination)

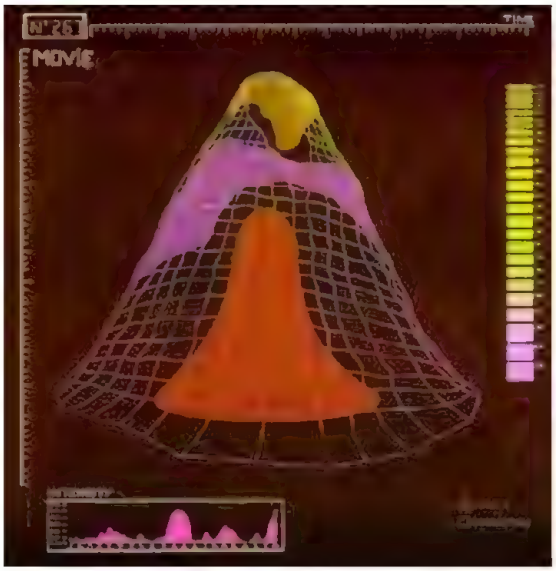
Although some of its pages may resemble a comics grid, Millán and Noguera's *Hervir un Oso* (*To Boil a Bear*) is not a comic strictly speaking. Neither is it an illustrated book, a novel, a joke book, or a poetry book. It is a book about ideas, very strange and seemingly illogic ideas, that are sometimes but not always, expressed in the form of a collection of images, like the one above, which constitutes, according to Thierry Groensteen's terminology, not a sequence, but a series: a group of images whose order is not determined by a narrative purpose (Groensteen, 1988: 65; Groensteen, 2007: ix).

Here we have a simple, apparently incoherent collection: six clay mounds with a film title and the name of a film director on their stands[1]. In the previous two pages, Millán and Noguera pose one

1 They are obviously inspired, of course, by the mound clay Richard Dreyfuss unconsciously gives form in Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977).

of their Dadaistic ideas: they imagine the possibility of having some sort of pre-credits before the beginning of every movie projection where we would get a three-second fragment showing what the film director is actually doing in the same moment we are sitting at the theatre. For instance, a flash of Martin Scorsese washing dishes at home, Francis Ford Coppola having dinner with some friends, Almodóvar hunting elephants in Africa, or Ridley Scott dying at hospital. Then, the pre-credits become usual in Hollywood and European cinema, but one day, there is a surprise - some film buffs are ready to watch Coppola's new film and a very unsettling scene appears in front of their eyes before the credits start. Coppola, Spielberg and Scorsese are sitting on a table with an unknown man. This man, in a Hawaiian shirt, is giving them three clay mounds. These mounds represent their next three movies. Each mound contains all the necessary information to make the movie, but its box-office success will depend on each director's ability to interpret the form of the mound and shoot the film. It suddenly becomes clear that it is not the first time this strange scene has happened: the man in the Hawaiian shirt has been handing out clay mounds to Hollywood film directors since 1941, as far as we know.

This fact and many others can be deduced from the page above. Although the order of the clay mounds cannot be translated in terms of time-relations, each image contains temporal and symbolic information by itself, which allows us to reconstruct the particular History of Cinema Millán and Noguera propose. If we pay attention to the serial numbers written near the title and year of production, we will know, for instance, that before *Citizen Kane* (1941) there were five other movies made with the help of the information contained in the clay mounds. We can also deduce that there was an exponential leap in the man with the Hawaiian shirt's activity during the sixties, a very conspiranoic-friendly decade: before *Psycho* (1960), he "commanded" only 1073 films, but after that, the number rises to 18654 in just eight years (*2001: A Space Odyssey*, 1968). And last but not least: we also know that the man in Hawaiian shirt is giving very strange orders to David Lynch, whose clay mounds are, unlike his colleagues', considerably flat (*Twin Peaks*, 1990-91).



Millán, J. and Noguera, M. (2010) *Hervir un Oso* (Bilbao: Belleza Infinita) (no pagination)

What makes David Lynch so different from the others? Why does this man decide to take over the Hollywood industry precisely during the sixties? Why are all these talented film directors following the man's orders in secret? And what about the role of the film critic? If making a film is merely a question of interpreting a clay mound, then shooting a

movie becomes a purely critical task, which debases the film critic's job by turning it into an interpretation of an interpretation... All these weird paradoxical questions are suggested by the graphic and verbal information contained in this apparently non-narrative series of images, which makes me wonder if we should take Groensteen's definition of series for granted. Although the clay mounds' apparition order do not articulate a narration, when we interpret the graphic and verbal information they give us, we are hypothesizing some sort of proto-narration within a classic Aristotelian structure, including a beginning (around 1941), a turning point (the critical decade of the sixties) and a possible denouement with the arrival of David Lynch: the end of the history of cinema (and the end of structure).

But this could not be possible without the active participation of the reader. In fact, when we read pages like this, what we do is more or less the same thing these film directors do when "reading" their mound clays. The ultimate paradox of Millán and Noguera's pre-credits idea is that creation is, in fact, a particular form of interpretation, and the possibility that the history of cinema (or comics, or literature, or any other narrative form) derived from the decisions of only one man, dressed in a Hawaiian shirt. We, readers and spectators, are that man.

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The cruel beauty of a world without words: Winshluss' *Pinocchio*

by Esther Claudio

Snow White raped by the seven dwarfs, the Pied Piper of Hamelin using children as soldiers, Jiminy Cricket transformed into an amoral cockroach and Pinocchio, the driving thread of the whole plot, is just a metal puppet without feelings or conscience. Winshluss' style resorts to pantomime and the aesthetics of Golden Age comics (even the colour is reminiscent of old newspapers) to provide a sharp reinterpretation of *Pinocchio*'s tale. After all, if fairy tales convey the given values of a community, it seems logical that their adaptation will reflect, in a way, the present world. In this work, Winshluss provides an ironic, cruel and funny view of current society through Pinocchio and other characters from Western folklore.

Most of the tale is narrated as a pantomime, that is, without dialogue or sounds, just images. Conversations are limited to certain stories or characters; for instance, when Jiminy Cricket appears to share his reflections about the existential void and life in general.

To succeed in conveying all the information that would normally be transmitted by words, the rest of elements (facial expressions, imagery, panel shapes, layout, etc.) must be emphasized. In pantomime, as Will Eisner explains in his influential Comics and Sequential Art[1], expression and gesture must be exaggerated in order to become narrative devices themselves. Winshluss' characters certainly follow this premise and they verge upon caricature.

However, in order to make pictures bear the narrative weight, a cooperation between reader and author becomes necessary. Back to Eisner: "this very voluntary cooperation, so unique to comics, underlies the contract between artist and audience" (2006: 40). This is evident in Winshluss's ability to control the reader's attention and to dictate the sequence in which the reader will follow the narrative, as we see on this page:

1 The interesting section "Images without words" in chapter 2 "Images" is devoted to pantomime and the use of imagery to narrate without words.

Winshluss (2009) *Pinochio* (Barcelona: La cúpula, 129)

In this apparently simple sequence of panels we witness a tragic but sarcastic event. Reading from left to right, up to down, we see the dog, in despair, holding on tight to a wall while Pinocchio approaches. The next panel is both narrative and descriptive: it shows a close up of the dog's facial expression that communicates both his shock at meeting Pinocchio and his terror for the prosecution he is suffering. The next one sets the soldiers on the horizon coming to kill him. Those soldiers are shown in close up in the next panel; from what we can deduce they are moving nearer. To increase the sense of danger, they are portrayed as dark figures, and by being placed on the panel borders, the dog seem to have no escape whatsoever.

The two protagonists are also in the darkness in the next panel, but the effect is different here: it intends to reflect the despair of the one who is running away, his fear and his need of help. The drama is also emphasized by the absence of background or any unncessary elements, as in the next panel, where only a vital detail is shown: Pinocchio's hand held out offering help to his friend.

These three central panels stand out by their symmetry, which becomes a narrative device too. Thus, the shadows in the first panel link with the second one and in the second and third ones, the similarity lies in the composition: a descending diagonal from left to right, first from Pinocchio's nose to his friend's hand and then from one hand to the other.

But then, against all odds, the plot twists and the dog cheats Pinocchio: he takes his hand away and he jumps into the path of his prosecutors. Here, the black hands surround him literally framing our two friends, as in the panel above. The dog falls to the ground laughing out loud and, in an image which is four times bigger than the other panels, they chop him up in pieces. This last panel is the climax of the story and it takes pleasure in the moment that it describes. It is an image with no frame, conveying unlimited space and time, which revels in that space that seems to expand onto the rest of panels. Here, time stops. There is no more narration, just a sequence of images, as in the previous frames.

In fact, the slaughter could also be told in panels – with a limb popping off on one of them and the assassins faces on the other, for instance – but it is not. Instead, the fixed expansive image stops the rhythm of narration to highlight that instant - as if time would stop there. And in some way, it does. The uniformity of the rest of panels gives a certain constant reading tempo, like a watch's tick-tock. Thus, if each panel lasts, for example, one second, we could say that the final image lasts four seconds, as it takes up the place of four panels. Time and space overlap, as is characterstic of comics narrative language, and the spatial expansion of a panel implies also a time expansion, making an instant last forever.

Such a bloody and macabre scene seems even more cruel when we look at the flower ornament that frames it in its lower border. The pretty red roses contrast with the scene's violence, granting it an aesthetic value that the rest of the story did not have.

This sarcastic and even morbid style is very characteristic of Winshluss, whose work oozes irony and nihilism. On this page the dog, who has been mistreated all his life and who, even being a good

friend, does not obtain the salvation that he could morally deserve. His nature, in this case his wicked sense of humour, drives him unrelentingly to his end and his life does not seem to have had any effect. Pinocchio, a puppet without feelings, leaves calmly while the world takes its course.

After all, nothing makes sense in this empty and sarcastic world that Winshluss presents in the guise of a children's tale with pantomime-comic aesthetics that are reminiscent of the newspapers from the 50s. A brilliant portrait of contemporary society, carried out through a work full of details and symbolism that transforms each page into a work of art.

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"¡Santo!": The Stuff of Legend

by Ernesto Priego

Cruz, J.G, Del Valle, M. and Del Valle, D. (1952) *Santo, el enmascarado de plata* (México: Ediciones José G. Cruz) Wednesday 3 September 1952, page 4. See translation in the footnote:[1]

In 1952 television was still a very recent phenomenon in Mexico and Latin America, and commercial TV channels would not be available until three years later. According to Mexican comics historian Armando Bartra (2001:147), by the 1950s 50% of the Mexican population was literate (in comparison to the 5% in the 1940s). In the 1950s there were 25 million Mexicans, and "four or five million" of them read comics.

According to Bartra, this was the decade in which the indigenous Mexican *pepines* (as the local 12 x 15cm black and white publications were known due to the mainstream popularity of *Pepín* and other similar comics periodicals) became

1 Translation: *Header*: What was the origin of the amazing legend of the legendary character known as "Santo - the man of the sliver mask"? Where was he born? What was he like? No one has ever been able to answer these questions... he appeared one day without knowing where he came from... only one thing was obvious and known by all: his kindness, the love he felt for the weak and helpless... The barrio of "Santa Cruz" adored him... and had made him into a hero...! *Panel 1:* Background illustrations by Manuel and David del Valle. *Panel 2:* Wherever there was someone in need or in trouble the mysterious character always appeared to provide help. *Panel 3:* Here! I've heard what's happening at your place: your wife is in bed and doesn't have money to feed your kids... "Santo"! *Panel 4:* After doing his good deed he disappeared quickly, without anyone knowing where he hid..."

closer, in form, format and plot to the standard American comic book of the time. Television would still need one more decade to become available to the working classes, and there were only about 300 cinema theatres in the whole country.

By then, *lucha libre* (Grobet et al 2005) offered a combination of theatre, sport, melodrama and a popular sense of justice that did not generally exist in the sociopolitical arena. José Guadalupe Cruz (1917-1989) was behind a prolific and profitable comics publishing empire, and it was his idea to turn the already-popular *lucha libre* star "*Santo*" into a comics hero. Publisher, producer, writer, editor and marketer, Cruz was a pioneer of transmediality, producing series with characters and situations that incorporated celebrities from other artistic forms (cinema, journalism, the stage) and de facto blurred the boundaries between realist figurative representation through drawings and fictional, fantastic social realism through photomontage and mixed media.

According to Bartra, Cruz's *Santo, una revista atómica*, came out every Monday, Thursday, and Saturday, with 31 pages of story in each issue (though the magazine was also published with the subtitle *"un semanario atómico"* – "an atomic weekly"). This made it, in Bartra's words, "the world's fastest comic book". Spin-offs and parallel series were also published due to the original's success, and *Santo, el enmascarado de plata* would run from 1955 until 1986 on a weekly and bi-weekly basis. The fact that *el enmascarado de plata* was a real, public and incredibly popular public figure (Roberto Guzmán Huerta, 1917-1984), in combination with the extreme deadlines that demanded the production of thirteen pages per day, had as a consequence the merging of technical and aesthetic conditions: the mixing of hand-drawn illustration and lettering with photo-montage.

Ediciones José G. Cruz Presentan: Santo, el enmascarado de plata, un semanario atómico, 3 September 1952 (cover)

The photographic compositional work of José Trinidad Romero (1925-1999) was essential to define the *noir* feel of the book, which *a priori* required printing on cheap paper on black and white, often sepia inks and tones, favoured by the Mexican comics industry of the time. In spite of being technically what often is referred in English as "fumetti", or photo-comic, the publication advertised and defined itself as an historieta, or comic book, often with non-photographic covers:

Unlike other photo-comics and even regular comics of the time published in Mexico, *Santo's* hand-drawn lettering matched the attempts to make the photographic work look and feel like comics illustration. The publication, as exemplified by the cover above, made no attempt to disguise its kinship with previous or contemporary American comics (Dick Tracy (1931-1977) by Chester Gould (1900-1985) comes to mind) and thus liberating a series of

intertextual references that at the same time emphasised the publication's urban audience (Mexico City's 1950s middle class fashion was not too dissimilar from what could be seen in Chicago or New York City).

Santo's "origin" sequence is very obviously influenced by cinema and superhero comics, particularly the *Bat-Man* (May 1939) by Bob Kane: the darkened alley, the silhouetted hero on the rooftop, the Fedora hats, the vigilante who rans away, without accepting acknowledgement or publicity, remaining a mystery. If, as Mark Fisher wrote, "the Batman mythos has been about the switching of Gothic Fear into heroic Justice" (2005), *Santo* switched Catholic/Colonial Fear into Charitable Justice (page 1 is a splash panel where the reader sees the luchador from behind, kneeling in front of the Virgen morena, whom *Santo* had "as his only guide").

The writing is syntactically and grammatically clumsy ("legend" and "legendary" in the same sentence; a lack of agreement in verb tenses and modes between the captions in panels 2 and 4, which is further confused by the introduction of direct discourse in speech balloons in panel 3, etc.), and in retrospect the whole situation is commonplace and predictable. But this was 1952, literacy was still limited and Amazing Fantasy #15 would not appear across the border until June 1962... (you can see "your friendly neighborhood Santo" waving from the top of the building in the distance in panel 4, ten years before *Spiderman* made his debut).

The *noir* feel of the book has its roots in what could be called a transmedial *mestizaje* of different orders: a technological one, juxtaposing handmade artistry with photographic montage and live acting/modelling (very often it was Roberto Guzmán, el Santo, appearing as himself); a sociological one, representing the transition between the semi-literacy of the past with an Americanised idea of urban progress; an aesthetic and ideological one, integrating religious imagery (part of the same iconosphere as the *ex-votos*) and comics' penchant for the fantastic; and a trans-genre one, blending romantic melodrama with fantasy, Universal Pictures-style horror and a considerable dose of Catholic ethos.

Canadian scholar Anne Rubenstein wrote a 224-page book about Mexican comics only to conclude they were neither "good" nor "interesting" (1998:161), but as comics anthropologist and librarian Manuel Aurrecoechea has written,

> in spite of the fact that Mexican comics are an essential source of knowledge to understand what [Mexicans] have been, our comics are now the stuff of legend. (Aurrecoechea, no date, "La historieta popular.")

A lost classic like *Santo* #1 deserves further and thorough analysis. It reveals a fascinating underworld where heroism consists of charity, and where social realism is the work of fiction through the merging of elaborate montage, mixing manual and mechanical techniques.

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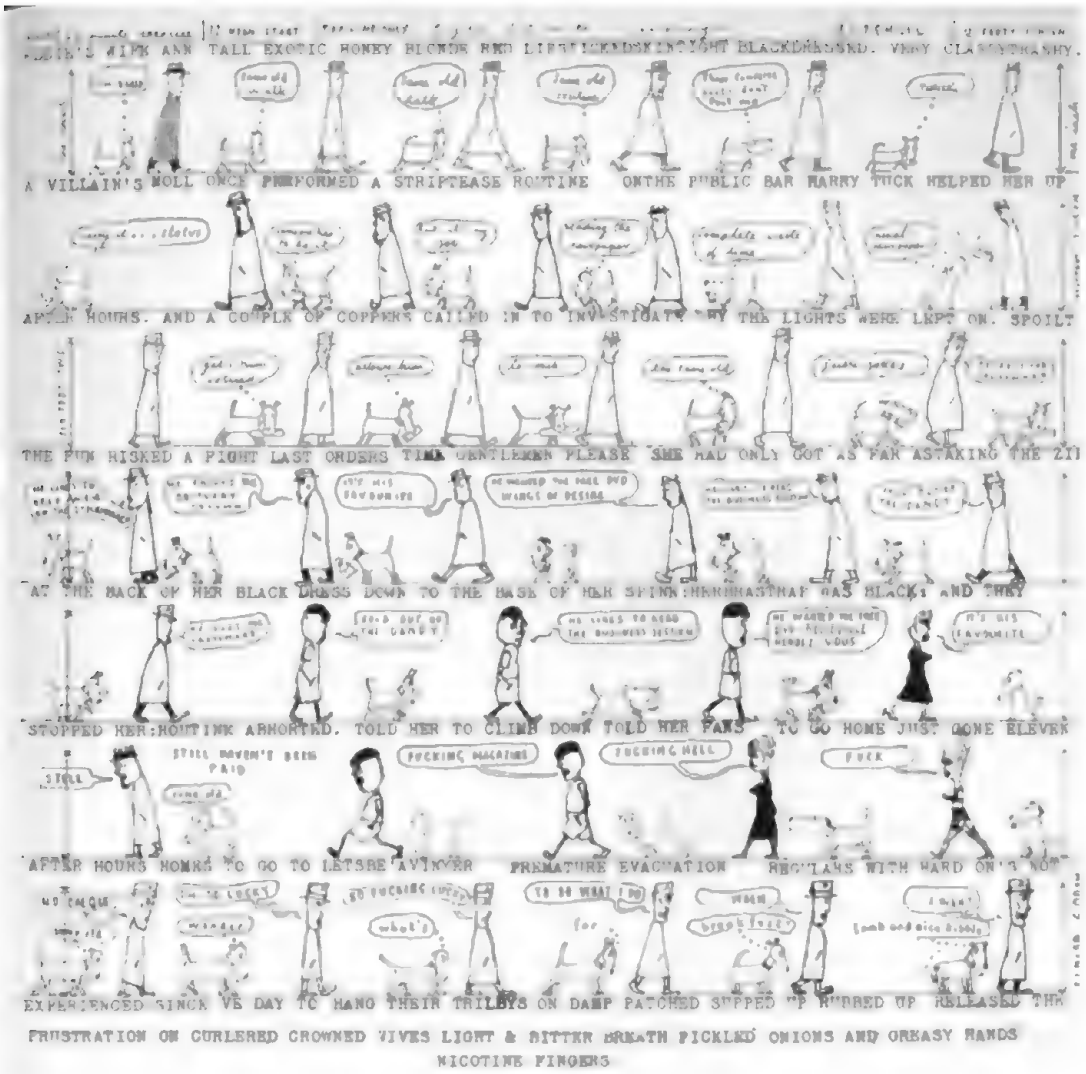
Walking the Dog – David Hughes

by Greice Schneider


A VILLAIN'S MOLL ONCE PERFORMED A STRIPTEASE ROUTINE ON THE PUBLIC BAR HARRY TUCK HELPED HER UP
AFTER HOURS. AND A COUPLE OF COPPERS CALLED IN TO INVESTIGATE WHY THE LIGHTS WERE LEFT ON. SPOILT
THE FUN RISKED A FIGHT LAST ORDERS TIME GENTLEMEN PLEASE SHE HAD ONLY GOT AS FAR AS TAKING THE ZI
AT THE BACK OF HER BLACK DRESS DOWN TO THE BASE OF HER SPINE HERRINGBONE HAS BLACK AND THEY
STOPPED HER: HOWEVER ABHORRED. TOLD HER TO CLIMB DOWN TOLD HER FANS TO GO HOME JUST GONE ELEVEN
STILL HAVEN'T BEEN PAID
FUCKING MAGAZINE
FUCKING HELL
FUCK
AFTER HOURS HOWEVER TO GO TO LETSBE AVOIDER PREMATURE EVACUATION
EXPERIENCED SINCE VE DAY TO HANG THEIR TRILBYS ON DAMP PATCHED SUPPED UP HURRIED UP RELEASED THE
FRUSTRATION OF CURLERED CROWNED WIVES LIGHT & BITTER BREATH PICKLED ONIONS AND GREASY HANDS
NICOTINE FINGERS

Hughes, David (2004) *Walking the Dog* (London: Jonathan Cape, no pagination)

In *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), Fredric Jameson claims that "in some of the most significant works of high modernism, what is boring can often be very interesting (...), and vice versa" (1991:71). Using examples from video art – a 21-minute video showing a face accompanied by an "incomprehensible and never-ending stream of keenings and mutterings" – Jameson proposes to approach the question of *boredom* as an aesthetic response. Nothing really happens in the video: "the face remaining utterly without expression, unchanging throughout the course of the work" (1991:71).

The result, as one could expect, is boredom. The point is that this reaction does not automatically imply that the work is "bad", but that the concept of boredom should be revisited. Jameson proposes to "to strip the concept of the boring (and its experience) of any axiological overtones and bracket the whole question of aesthetic value" (1991:71). What if the great length and uneventfulness are not a mistake, but actually a deliberate choice, a matter of "authorial intention", and, as so, could be interpreted "as provocation, as a calculated assault on the viewer" (1991:72)? In that case, boredom would not a bad reaction, but a perfectly appropriate response.

The same principle could be applied to any kind of cultural artifact, including comics. David Hughes' *Walking the Dog* could easily fall into that category. The book is composed by Hughes daily walks with his fox terrier Dexter, a dog he gets for his birthday after his doctor recommends him more exercise. On the one hand, we have the "external" world – the daily walks, the situations born out of the interaction with other dogs and dog owners. On the other hand, we have access to what's going on in the protagonist's head – a collection of loose thoughts on death and other morbid subjects and fantasies.

Walking the Dog is difficult to label. Given what's suggested by the paratext, one can wonder how this book should be read. David Hughes—who was not really known in the comics field until very recently—is described in the book jacket as "an artist whose work combines illustration, graphic design, photography and animation". The book itself already gives some hints of its ambition: a thick, heavy and large hardback cover that seems to be designed to look great on a coffee table, in company with other art books. At the same time, on the other hand, most of the book relies on a number of conventions of comics language.

Walking the Dog works more as a series of exercises on a single theme rather than as a single story. Looking for story arcs and events might actually prove a frustrating experience for those looking for linear storytelling. On his blog, Hughes says that the publisher's first idea was to have a 120-page graphic novel, but "he got a 300-plus page notebook on drawing". "I drew as I walked/ I drew as I went", says Hughes, and it is precisely this sketchbook character, so present throughout the whole work, that will guide the expectations towards the book.

The "dialectic of repetition and difference" (Groensteen, 2007:115) that plays such an important role in the comics medium, here sees its limits stretched, like in the image above. The page is divided into seven strips, showing the pair (protagonist + dog) 40 times (with some variations). Hughes subverts the reading directions conventions, adopting a zigzag trajectory in the seven strips that take the page. We follow Dexter and Hughes walking back and forth on the page, always protesting about something. The visual repetition matches not only the monotonal mood, but also works to impose rhythm, matching the text's steady cadence.

There are actually three types of text here in this page. Dexter complaining in the first three strips (I'm bored / Same old walk / same old talk /same old routine...), and then Hughes goes on with a

compilation of repetitive jokes about Dexter taking the newspaper (he does the crossword / he likes to keep an eye on the stock market / he enjoys the obituary column / it's his favorite / he wanted the free DVD of Wings of Desire / he likes to read the business section...). Moreover, each strip is placed over a line of typed text (apparently) unrelated to their situation. Besides being a long book, some pages demand quite some re-reading, what might take the reader to the point of exhaustion.

The choice of sticking to one theme (rather than creating a story that goes somewhere) allows Hughes to keep exploring and experimenting, playing with variations that involve not only drawing styles (from sketchy to detailed, for example), but also a number of materials – collages of photographs, book illustrations, lotto charts, diagrams, stamps. All this overwhelming acrobatics can be very disruptive on the narrative level, reminding the reader all the time of the materiality of the book. But this chaos and excess are coherent with the chosen theme and mood: in the long run, the narrative rejection forces the reader to another kind of approach.

In a recent article about abstraction in comics, Jan Baetens wrote about this "multi-layered nature" of the reading process:

> the foregrounding of the plastic dimension of visual signs is always a possibility for those who either do not 'enter the story' or who try to go beyond the narrative surface. In both cases, the resistant reading will focus on material and abstract properties of the work that may go completely unnoticed by the story-driven reader.
> (Baetens 2011:110)

So, what's the deal with this book? Just like the case of experimental video mentioned above, all disengagement and resistance brought by medium-opacity and plot uneventfulness do not represent a menace (once fictional immersion is deliberately weak anyway), but rather an alternative way of reading comics.

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"He do the police in different voices": Martin Rowson's Pulp Modernism

by Tony Venezia

> *...the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.*
> T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent"

I NEEDED TO CHECK A FEW FACTS, MAKE SOME CONNECTIONS. I STILED THE LIBRARY DOWN AT THE MUSEUM. THE PLACE LOOKED LIKE THE NEWS STAND AT GRAND CENTRAL STATION. ONLY IT HAD A BIGGER SELECTION OF COMIC BOOKS
I'D LIKE VOLUME SEVENTEEN OF THE ENCYCLOPEDIA
VOLUME SEVENTEEN, SIR? I THINK YOU'LL FIND THAT FROM TUCKSHOPS TO ROMANCES
AND I STILL DIDN'T FIND A THING THAT SAID IT WAS JUST COINCIDENCE THAT MURDERS SEEMED TO HAPPEN ROUND ME LIKE FOOT BATHS SOUND A BEVERLEY HILLS FLOP HOUSE
DETECTIVE

Rowson, M. (1990) *The Waste Land* (New York: Harper and Row) (no pagination)

The page is taken from comics artist and satirist Martin Rowson's graphic adaptation of T.S. Eliot's canonical high modernist masterpiece, *The Waste Land*. Trekking through the modernist ruins is the shadowy figure of Marlowe (Chris, rather than Philip); a detective attempting to shore up these fragments into some sort of meaning. The characters and situations from the writing of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett are ingeniously mapped onto the "thematic concerns and motifs of Eliot's poem, emphasising the [...] parallels between modernism and hardboiled fiction." (Scaggs, 2005: 83).

On a basic formal level, this is a prime example of the page as a single expressive unit. The eye takes in the representation of a contiguous space, the placement of characters, the dialectical weaving of image and text. A single page, a single space, and on the face of it a single moment.

In the middle background we can barely identify a figure resembling Eliot himself, apparently in the process of researching and piecing together his poem, requesting a copy of Jessie L. Weston's anthropological study of the Grail legend, *From Ritual to Romance* - a work that fulfils virtually the same function for *The Waste Land* that *The Odyssey* did for Joyce's *Ulysses*. Framing the foreground are two figures. To the left, the instantly recognisable Ezra Pound, who famously edited *The Waste Land*. To the right, the detective Marlowe, holding a copy of a pulp magazine.

Formalist description will only carry us so far – what is also demanded is another kind of literacy not tied to the flat surface of the page. This requires a certain kind of competence, a more active participation whereby the reader becomes part detective, part archivist, reading Eliot's "historical sense" against the grain.

Rowson's graphic adaptation explicitly embeds and emphasises its relationship with Eliot's existent text. This is only appropriate: after all, Eliot's poem enacts in exemplary form the notion of text-as-archive, a model of textual transcendence that Genette identified as *transtextuality*, in other words "all that sets the text in relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts." (Genette, 1991: 1).

It is therefore entirely apt that the setting on the excerpted page is a library. In fact it is clearly identifiable, in anglophone terms, as the library – the British Library reading room formerly at the British Museum, hence the figure of one of the most famous readers in the lower left, Karl Marx. The library is of course an archive, a place of discourse and legitimation, at once both material and imaginative – the place that effects, literally and figuratively, as Foucault memorably put it; "the general system of the formation and transformation of statements." (Foucault, 1989: 146).

The "historical sense" that Eliot refers to, a "simultaneous existence" and "simultaneous order", is explicitly canonical opposing modernism with mass culture – in fact, following traditional cultural historiographies "pulp" is an antonym for "modernism". However, pulp fiction shadowed the modernist avant-gardes, replicating its autocritique of modernity's conditions and crises in weird genre bleeds, particularly those found in a journal like *Weird Tales* (see Mieville, 2009, *passim*).

More recently, studies have re-read this relationship as a more complex set of engagements and exchanges: it is also no coincidence that the comics of Herriman and McCay emerged around the same time as Dada and Surrealism[1].

Yet Eliot's poetic collage incorporated "marginal vernaculars of modernity: the language of women, of machines, of popular culture." (Suarez, 2001: 764). We can see that, as Mark Fisher puts it in another context, Rowson's "pulp modernism reacquaints modernism with its disavowed pulp doppelgänger." In the process of reaffirming the canonical status of Eliot's poem, Rowson opens up a discursive archival space for the rearticulation of high modernism's concealed relationship with its popular cultural other.

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1 For links between the material print cultures of modernism and pulp see Sorenson; for a comparison of hard boiled literary and cinematic noir with contemporary modernism see Rabinowitz; for analogies between early twentieth century comics and modern art see Inge, "Chapter 4: Krazy Kat as American Dada Art"

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Berlin: chemistry on and of the page

by Nina Mickwitz

Jason Lutes' multiple narrative charting Berlin during the 1920s and 30s (*Berlin: City of Stones*, 2009, and *Berlin: City of Smoke*, 2009) could be described as a retrospective city symphony in graphic narrative form. As Anthony Enns writes, "the comic form allows the present to become aware of its own archive not only because it juxtaposes words and images, but also because it reflects the experience of the modern city, which is itself also an archive." (Enns, 2010: 45)[1]

Here I wish to explore the sequence depicting the beginning of the romantic relationship between two of the main characters of Lutes' ensemble cast. Book one, *City of Stones*, opens with the meeting on the train to Berlin of Marthe Müller, a prospective art student, and Kurt Severing, a journalist in September 1928. Their ways part, but they briefly meet again in a bar where Marthe sits with her fellow students. As Marthe finds herself spending a lonely Christmas in the city she decides to pay Kurt an impromptu visit at his lodgings and is invited in.

So this is where you work over there?
You seem very practical
You should see the waistline
There is a moment when a body becomes more than a body.
Yours was the last time I saw you, laughing with your ephemeral schoolmates
Oh my
Like Margarethe could, like I could, in a time far out of reach
Stop!

Lutes, J. (2009) *Berlin: City of Stones* (Montréal: Drawn and Quarterly, 130, 1-6)

The middle top panel and Kurt's thoughts, expressed in lettering connoting the type-writer which is his professional and expressive tool, in the insets signal his acute awareness of Marthe's physical

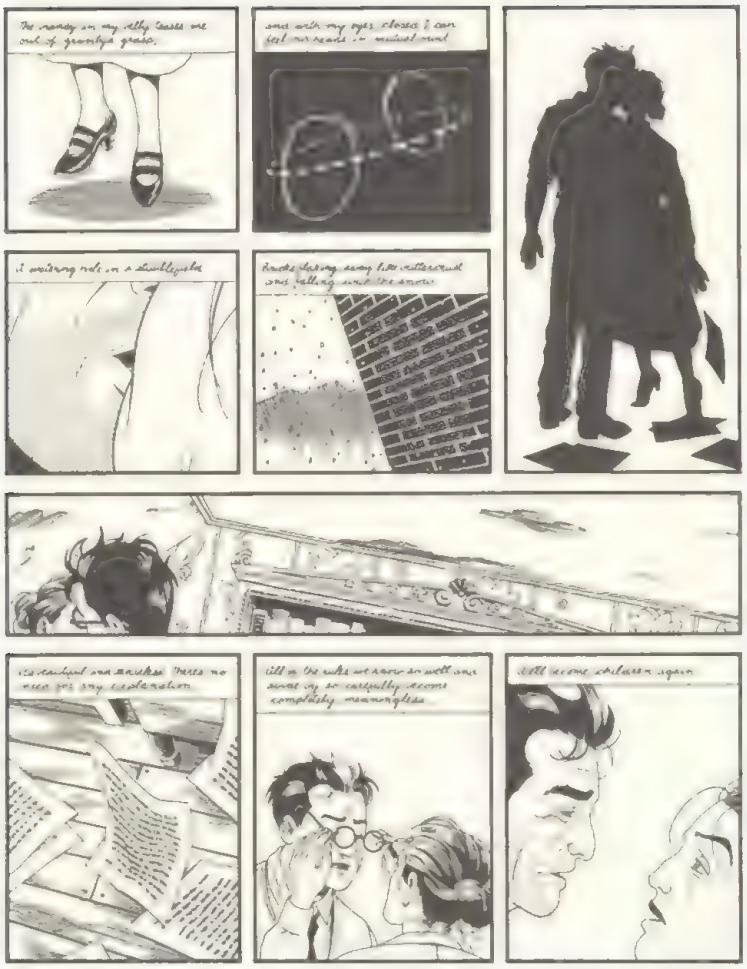
1 Paul Ricoeur also writes about the city as archive; as 'giv(ing) itself as both to be seen and to be read' (Ricoeur, 2004: 151)

presence in the room and the undercurrent of sexual tension which belies the slightly awkward exchanges between them.

Lutes, J. (2009) *Berlin: City of Stones* (Montréal: Drawn and Quarterly, 130, 7-11)

The last panel on page 130 shows a moment of transition, an exchange of looks in which the setting of Kurt's room has disappeared and all that remains is the recognition of a mutual connection.

On the following page the narrative voice in the insets is Marthe's, in the joined-up writing we know from previous diary entries and the panels on the top half of the page take on her subjective emotional response. Marthe's poetic comments are given visual equivalents which are close enough to at first glance run the risk of redundancy. However, the echoing of visual forms; the elliptical shadow beneath her floating feet with the schematic orbit encircling their heads, the line of her cheek in the panel below mirroring the angle of the brick wall next to it intensify the vertiginous sensation already indicated in the high angle view of the pair on the previous page as Kurt's manuscript pages slide of the sideboard as a result of their tussle. In the vertical right hand panel all detail is obliterated as their two figures join as a suspended silhouetted shape. Both the black and the white area in this panel are devoid of particularity, instead all that remains is the contrast between two aspects; connection and dissociation. The repeated image of falling papers and the diagonal lines across this double page spread signal the heightened emotional state of the scene.



Lutes, J. (2009) *Berlin: City of Stones* (Montréal: Drawn and Quarterly, 131)

And yet, in this coming together a Derridean 'trace'[2] of separateness remains. The narration in the insets ultimately remains separated by the spine of the book. Side by side, together and afforded equal space, but their experiences of the situation still distinct and poignantly apart from each other. Following Derrida's deconstruction of the binary opposition of absence/ presence- while the concept of 'connection' is impossible without its relation, or *différánce*, to the notion of 'separation', so the trace of it – the presence of its absence- is a constitutive element of our understanding of 'connection'. Here, such *différance* is incorporated and maintained by the focalization through both characters as well as an extra-diegetic viewpoint and the slippages between internal and external in both text and image.

On these pages the possibilities of the comics page is utilised to incorporate the ambiguity and complexity of a seemingly simple and straight-forward, if sudden, intimate encounter between two people; the juxtaposition of interaction and inner emotional response.

2 See Gasché, R. (2002, 105-107)

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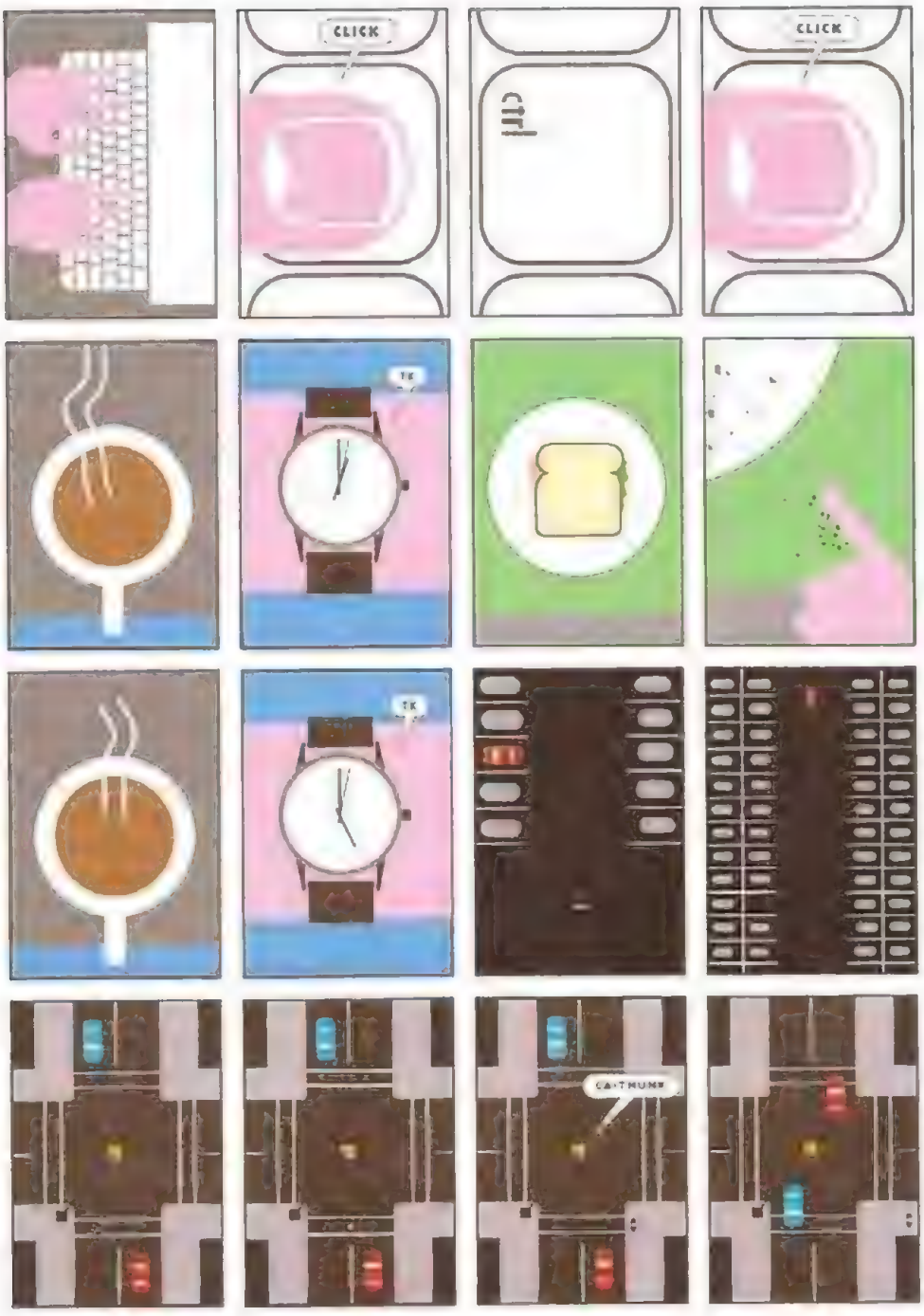
The not so cold world of Richard McGuire

by Roberto Bartual



McGuire, R. (2004) "Untitled", in Eggers, D., and Ware, C., (eds.) *McSweeney's Quarterly Concern* #13 (San Francisco: McSweeney's, 190)

Richard McGuire is best known to the comics world for his ground-breaking *Here*, a six page comic published in *RAW* Magazine in 1989. Those six pages are easily remembered by anyone who has ever set the eye on them, because they fully realize the potential of comics when it comes to represent time in a simultaneous manner. Inside each panel we can see several events that happened in the same space, a house, but in different times, the story of several generations of the same family. Here is Proust's ideal came true: memory itself incarnated into a piece of paper.

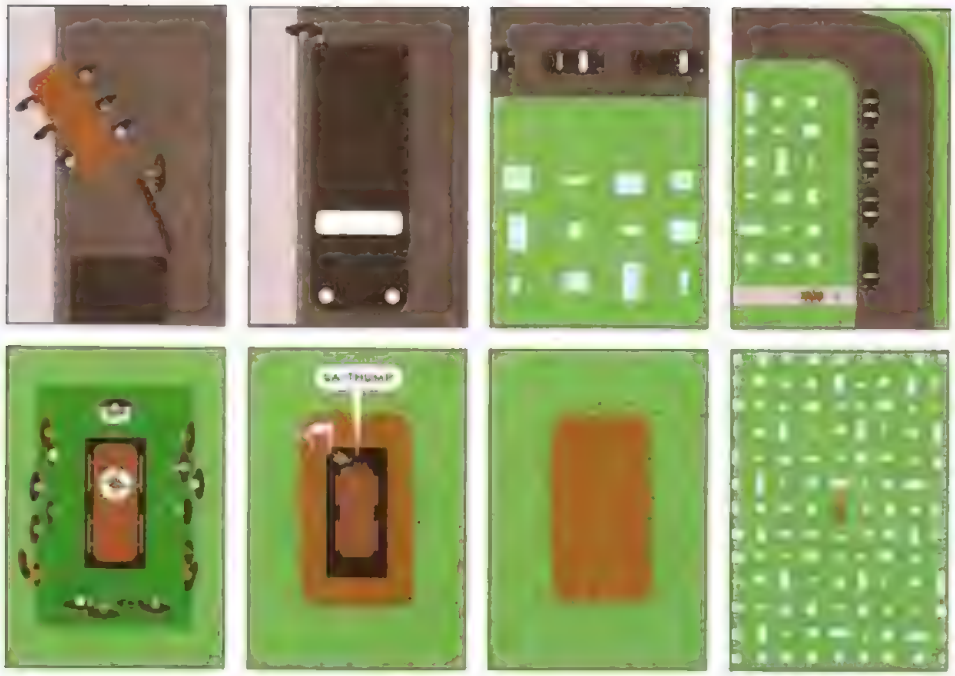
Although we can also use the term "comics of everyday life" to describe it, his second "major" contribution to comics, an untitled piece published in Chris Ware-edited *McSweeney's* #13, has nothing to do with memory and experimental patterns of time representation. Far from that, the narrative is reduced to its bare elements, and it follows a totally straightforward storyline: a man gets up in the morning, he mows the lawn, has breakfast, goes to work, works, goes home, has a car accident, he dies. And that's all[1].

I have tried to sum up the story in the same telegraphic and functional style McGuire's pictures suggest, but of course I failed. There's more to this story than simple abstraction and mechanical repetition. Everything is in the details. Can it be suggested in a more subtle way that our protagonist has been drinking coffee all day long, than by drawing steam lines in both cups in panels 5 and 9? What about the differences in shape of the steam lines? Since the first one is curved to the left, and the second one to the right, it can only mean that the air current inside the office has slightly changed its direction during that time lapse...

This extreme attention to insignificant details gives life to the pictures, making it impossible to properly summarize them with words. Richard McGuire's works for the comic medium (*Here*, *Popeye and Olive*) seem to be very cold on a first sight, but a closer reading may prove them otherwise. Inspired by computer icons and 8-bit videogame graphics, McGuire has chosen the most impersonal graphic style he could conceive. In addition to that, he represents every object and every person from above, forcing a point of view which inevitably distances us from the story. The pictures actually look like old videogames such as *Pac-Man*, *Attic Attack* or *Gauntlet*. But if we let our gaze linger on them, if we follow the sequence of panels very slowly, it is actually possible to experience a certain illusion of movement (especially when the scene is crowded, like the one below) and see all these dots and blocks of color moving frantically and erratically like Pacman's existential hero in his labyrinth[2].

1 Richard McGuire's covers for *The New Yorker* are very representative of his cold, but tender style. El Tío Berni has compiled them in Entrecomics.

2 This same illusion becomes explicit in Micro Loup, an animation short where Richard McGuire also uses an extreme high-angle point of view.



McGuire, R. (2004) "Untitled", in Eggers, D., and Ware, C., (eds.) *McSweeney's Quarterly Concern #13* (San Francisco: McSweeney's, 191, 9-16)

By means of projecting on the page our memories of those videogames and the characteristic motions of their graphics, McGuire's pictures become alive; but alive in quite a paradoxical manner. One gets a funny feeling seeing how these all insignificant icons enact grave human scenes, like a funeral , or performing very boring but familiar gestures, like putting all the bread crumbs together with a finger.

These scenes and gestures belong to the world of the everyday life; we know the intimate rituals they entail because we have lived through them. And because we have also attended funerals and wiped the bread crumbs with our finger, we expect these things to be represented with a style we are familiar with. When these kind of things are represented in such an abstract style, a style so removed from the real world, there is a certain sense of displacement, that certain feeling of strangeness that, according to Greice Schneider, resides in many "everyday life comics" (Schneider, 2010: 43). Like watching a zombie, everything seems right from the distance, but when you get nearer, there is something in the way of walking that just doesn't fit.

That tension between the artificial and cold style of McGuire's pictures and the realistic and life-like nature of the narration makes it easy for the reader to take some distance; and from the distance it is not difficult to appreciate some sort of irony in this short story. It's the golden rule of comedy: the further you are, the funnier everything seems: "If a cut my finger, it's tragedy; but if you fall into a sewer and die, it's funny", Mel Brooks stated (Carrier, 2000: 20).

In a static medium like comics, McGuire achieves the same effect Cathy Jones did in her short film *An Abstract Autobiography* (2001), where drawing inspiration from Norman McLaren, she translated very common experiences into an abstract language, with hilarious results due to the unexpected associations: sibling rivalry is represented by means of a big circle incessantly followed by two smaller attention-seeking circles; loneliness, by an Atari-like ping pong setting where a single ball bounces on the walls over and over again.

McGuire has not turned quotidian life into a cold abstraction. Like Cathy Jones and Norman McLaren, he has conferred humanity to abstract shapes. And what is art if not infusing human life into dead shapes?

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Thor's Comic Opera: *Götterdämmerung* Revisited

by Michael Hill

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PASSIONS AND POTIONS
Based on the opera GOTTERDAMMERUNG by Richard Wagner as adapted by Roy Thomas

Thomas, R., Pollard, K., Stone, C., and Gafford, C., *The Mighty Thor* #299, p. 1, cover date September 1980, in *Thor: The Eternals Saga* Vol.2 (New York: Marvel Publishing, 2007, p.134)

Based on Norse mythology, the comic-book character *The Mighty Thor* was created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby and first published by Marvel Comics in 1962. The character has been variously

referred to in Thor comics as 'Goldmane', 'a godling', 'the offal of Asgard', a 'molecular rearranger', 'Lord of the Living Lightning' and 'Master of the Shrieking Storm Winds' as well as the nickname 'Goldilocks' from Stan Lee.

Roy Thomas, principal writer and editor of this collection of issues No. 292-301 *Thor: The Eternals Saga*, commented on the character's design:

> [...] Thor was handsome. Handsome, hell-he was darn near beautiful, if that word can be applied to a super hero. His face and form were those of an idealized Adonis or Hercules, the flaring white wings on his helmet were as graceful as a true hawk's, and his flowing golden hair swirled in the winds he created with his hammer. (Thomas 2006: 38)

As the image above reveals, Thor has no hammer in issue No. 299 (2007, 134) of the saga, "Passions And Potions" an adaptation of *Götterdämmerung* or *Twilight of the Gods* from Wagner's *The Ring of the Nibelung* cycle of four operas. He plays Siegfried, not a god but a man, his lady friend Sif is Brunnhilda, and his enchanted hammer Mjolnir is swapped for a sword named Needful. The sword is invincible but the man is mortal. The setting is not Asgard but an alternative universe down the Rainbow Bridge called Midgard, or Earth, in that part called Germany where along the River Rhine Thor, sorry Siegfried, meets up with the Rhinemaidens guarding the Rhinegold.

I can hear the spoiler alert chimes ringing so I won't divulge any further plot details apart from the fact that in other chapters in this collection Thor's secret identity of Dr. Donald Blake is referred to and there are scenes of dragon slaying, meetings with the *Avengers* and the *Celestials*, and frequent action sequences. This is opera *seria* (tragedy) not *buffa* (comedy) without music and dancing[1].

The story starts with a splash page, a formal comics storytelling device defined in *The World Encyclopedia of Comics* as "the establishing panel, covering an entire page in a comic book story; also called a bleed panel." (Horn 1976: 735) The splash page was subsequently described by Will Eisner as

> [...] an introduction... a launching pad for the narrative [that] seizes the reader's attention and prepares his attitude for the events to follow [and that] becomes a 'splash' page proper rather than simply a 'first page' when the artist designs it as a decorative unit. (Eisner 2008: 64)

The splash page generally works as a substitute for the standard grid layout of comics page design for although it may contain multiple images these are most often fused into a single form. Eisner

1 On the two types of opera, a good reference is *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, now available online through Oxford Music Online. A subscription is required; some university and public libraries may hold one.

also argued the "two frames" to a page claim that is made up of a panel on the page plus the page layout as a whole. (Eisner 2008: 41) Here the singular full page panel becomes the page apart from the gutter and the page number. There is no panel bleed.

The page has been graphically orchestrated by the artists Keith Pollard and Chic Stone and the colourist Carl Gafford and meets Eisner's expectation of a splash page. The characters stand on a rock ledge enveloped in pink and orange flames in a dramatic moment. Siegfried confidently and defiantly holds his sword aloft. The line marking the edge of the sword forms a neat elision and merging with the edge of a larger image of Siegfried's helmet. There is no panel border between these two images of differing scales within the one panel with the result that the singularity of the splash panel is preserved and the grid layout ignored. On each of the remaining sixteen pages of the issue, however, the comics grid returns.

Siegfried has fallen in love with Brunnhilda. His raised sword forms a neat boundary line on which to hang a larger image of his face in a romantic, heroic manner. The Eye of Odin looks on and, as if acknowledging the serial nature of comics, some summarising of the story so far is provided in a caption above the image for the edification of new readers and as a memory jog for continuing readers.

Thus this splash panel not only points to forward developments as Eisner asserts but also backwards to what has already taken placed. It also contains speech balloons, the chapter title, creator credits and a reference to Wagner's opera in adition to a banner headline for The Mighty Thor! All of these decorative graphic and textual elements fit together to form the splash panel that takes up an entire page and which points to the characters and drama that follows.

Thor's role as Siegfried and his experience of Ragnorok sit within that enduring comics genres, the superhero. In his study of that genre Gerard Jones concluded: "...after nearly seventy years, the comic book superheroes are still flying through the movie theaters, TV screens, video game consoles, and toy stores of the world." (Jones 2004: 339) Make that fifty years in Thor's case. The franchise has had a recent film, game, comic, figure and merchandise release, continuing the creative development not only of Norse but also of Marvel mythology.

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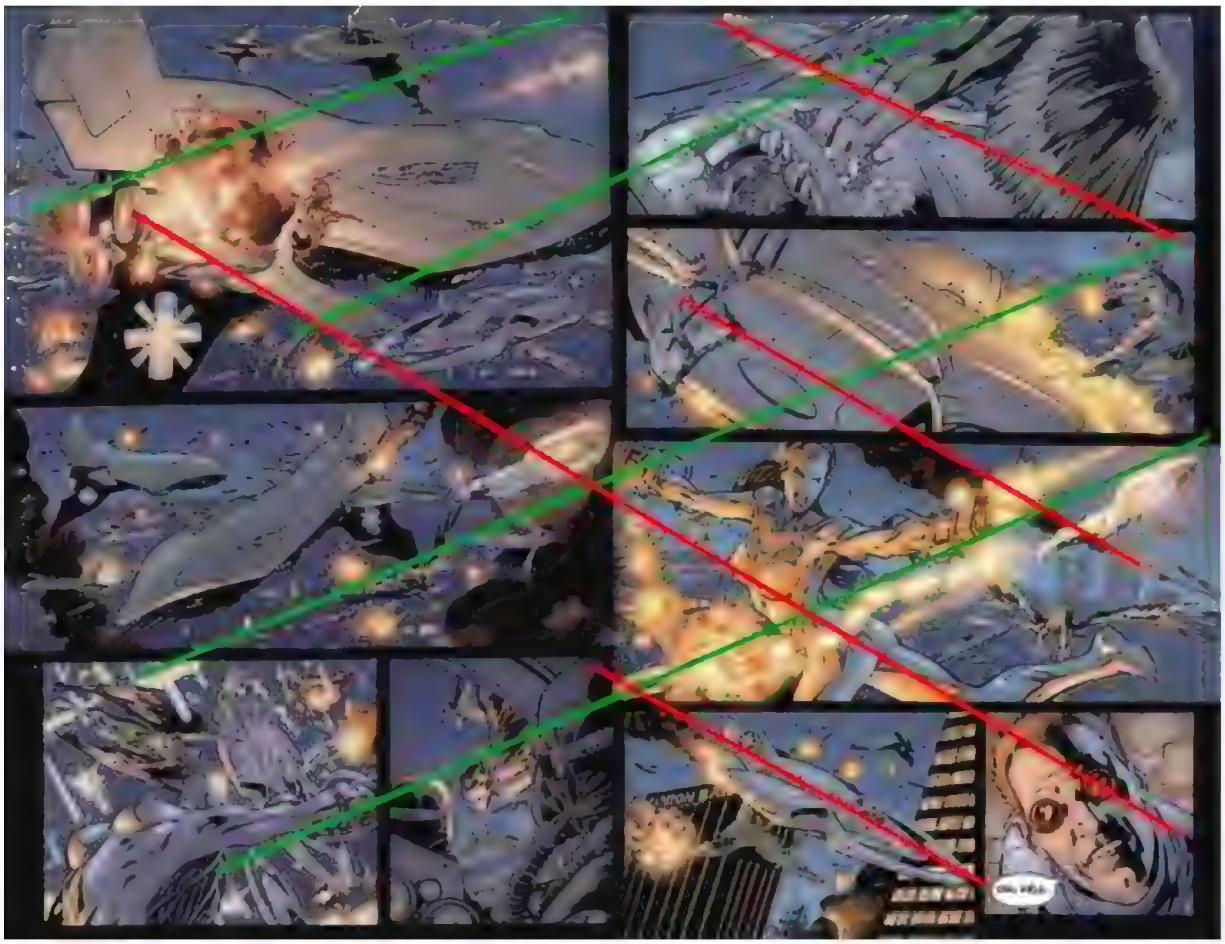
Disrupting the flow: *The Authority*

by Nicolas Labarre

The first twelve issues of *The Authority,* a super-hero series written by Warren Ellis, penciled by Bryan Hitch, with inks by Paul Neary and colors by Laura DePuy (now Laura Martin) were published by DC/WildStorm in 1999-2000, and are widely credited for influencing the aesthetic of super-hero comics in the following decade. In this two-page sequence, members of the Authority are fighting ships from an alternate dimension over Los Angeles. This is one of the numerous extended battle scenes for which the series is famous, and some of its salient characteristics are on display here: black margin, bleeding panels (1 and 7), panels occupying the width of the page (the so called "widescreen" style), the absence of sound effects, captions and speed lines.



Ellis, W., Hitch, B., Neary, P, and DePuy L. (1999) *The Authority* v.1 n°6, "Shiftships" (La Jolla: DC/Wildstorm, 8-9) [Image annotated by the author]

The apparent simplicity of the sequence is deceiving. Following the canonical reading order, the reader is confronted with apparent spatial contradictions. In panel 2, *Apollo* is still flying left to right, yet the damaged ship in the background seems to have reversed its direction. The same phenomenon occurs between panel 5 and panel 6: the ship in the background maintains its orientation, while the action in the foreground (*Swift's* tearing apart a cockpit) is reversed. Besides, the abstract cityscape cannot be used as visual reference, and all the elements in the frame can be assumed to be moving. In other words, the sequence does not construct a coherent diegetic space. Instead it relies on systematic graphical panel-to-panel matches, which conceal these impossible spatial relationships: in each case, an element in the background is moved to the foreground (*Apollo* in panel 1-2, the *Engineer* in 2-3, *the ship* in 3-4, *Swift* in 4-5, *the ship* in 5-6, the *Engineer* in 6-7, the ship in 7-8). The last two panels share no graphical elements and signal a break in this system. Buildings also appear, in panel 8, to re-anchor the scene within and understandable space. This restored sense of space allows the reader to perceive the ship as being about to crash on *the Doctor*. Furthermore, at this point, diegetic space coincides with the topography of the comic page, as the bottom of the page coincides with the lowest point in the diegetic space.

In addition to their sequential meaning, the two pages must therefore be read as a surface, to use Charles Hatfield's taxonomy (2005:48). While the row of panels are perfectly horizontal, the page is structured along two sets of parallel diagonal lines: the heroes are placed on a series of ascending lines (in green) and the foes mostly aligned with a downward diagonal (in red, especially in the second page). This may seem counterintuitive, as the heroes' trajectory runs counter to the reading order of the page, yet this is not the only device aiming to slow down reading instead of facilitating it.

These alignments also suggest ways to read the sequence across the fold, instead of going from top to bottom of each page. The most striking example is the continuity between the trajectory and position of Apollo in panel 2 and 7, two panels that are de facto connected by the absence of margin in both cases. The alignment between the ship in the bottom right corner of the first panel and the cockpit in the 5th panel obeys the same logic, which makes possible a tabular rather than linear reading of these two pages (Hatfield, 2005: 48). This is not a decorative strategy, though, in that these possible connections recreate to some extent the disorientation of a three-dimensional battle within the page. By inviting the reader to explore alternate sequences, it also expands reading time to the point where it is disconnected from the ostensible brevity of the action depicted.

The last strategy used in this regard is the overabundance of potentially relevant elements, especially at the moment where classical narration is about to be restored. The overabundances of details within single panels make it difficult to account for them all: however none of these background elements cannot be overlooked, since one of them is bound to become the focus of the action in the following panel. This is especially remarkable in the 7th panel, as no less than nine alien ships, three jet fighters, three superheroes and a series of explosions compete for the reader's attention. The

superimposition of the flashes of Engineer's weapon and the explosions caused by Apollo make it even more difficult to read properly.

None of the devices (composition emphasizing surface over sequence, tabular reading, panel overload) are new, but their presence counteracts the deliberate simplification of the comic grammar at work in *The Authority*. Only in the last two panels does an immediately legible sequence take place, concluding the sequence, with the panel's composition now paralleling the reading order. The Doctor's face is aligned with the crashing ship, and with the wing of the huge ship of the first panel. His chin even points toward the bottom right corner of the page, where the reading ends. The panel also contains the only speech balloon of the sequence, standing out in white, which as noted by Thierry Groensteen (1999:42), becomes remarkable thanks to the black margin, and the panel eschews the blue dominant of the rest of the sequence. The enlarged margin around the panel and its perfectly square shape reinforce its isolation, to ultimately draw the reader's attention away from these two-pages, to restore the narrative order.

What this scene suggests is that the aesthetic of The Authority requires formal innovations to allow for an effective reading, in particular to control reading speed and the perception of time in wordless action sequences. The voluntary renouncement to some aspect of the comics grammar leads to formal innovation that cannot but recall other examples of constrained narratives, such as those developed by the Oubapo (Beaty, 2007: 77-80).

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Pascal Blanchet's *White Rapids* and the Sense of History

by Kathleen Dunley

Pascal Blanchet's underrated 2007 work, *White Rapids* tells the story of a small town with a short history. Only 43 years had elapsed between the time when the town of Rapide Blanc was formed by the Shawinigan Water and Power Company and its abrupt abandonment. In telling its story, Blanchet evokes an aesthetic of place that remains central to the text's message since it points to a necessity; namely, the need to remember.

Blanchet did not experience the town when it was active, though he recalls his grandfather's stories from his travels to Rapide Blanc in the 1950's (Ghomeshi). As such, many images have a nostalgic veneer, stemming as they do from "fish stories." It can be easy to look at these images and see only the nostalgia. Indeed, as Caro notes, the marketing of the text emphasized the nostalgic impact. Yet, there are two elements of the text that point beyond nostalgia for nostalgia's sake: the appearance of documentary illustrations, and the final pages of the work that show an empty home.

By representing both true historical objects, together with the notion of storytelling, Blanchet succeeds in creating a sense of history that points towards Walter Benjamin's concept of *Erfahrung* as described in his "Some Motifs on Baudelaire." David Gross defines *Erfahrung* as

> a type of experience in which images from the past ... do not vanish when they combine with perception but continue to be present in the mind, giving experience a layered, multifaceted quality (46).

This form of history contrasts with the concept of *Erlebnis*; a term used to describe experience that is focused on the here and now, that "struts about in the borrowed garb of experience," yet "no breath of prehistory surrounds it" (Benjamin, 185).

Restorative nostalgia would fall into the latter category, and while Blanchet does restore a vision of the town, the subtext is that of *Erfahrung* – the drive to layer experience of past and present in a way that drives awareness of the histories that might otherwise be lost.

As previously stated, Blanchet accomplishes this, in part, by drawing from known historical images. Below is one example of Blanchet's own map from *White Rapids*:

Blanchet P. (2007) *White Rapids* (Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly) (no pagination)

When compared to historical images and maps of the town, it becomes clear that the shape of the place did not alter from one rendering to another. Indeed, Blanchet's map, despite its sepia tone and presence in a somewhat fictional story, asserts that the town was a true place, and one with a visual history. While the goings on in the buildings that are shown on this map (the parties, the road-trips, the curling club's celebrations) are rooted in stories, the place itself remains solid. It is this combination of real and storied that evokes Benjamin's Erfahrung, a drive that points towards a richer sense of history.

David Glassberg defined the "sense of history" as an intrinsic component of a modern, layered sense of the past that combines both the personal memories of an area, but also stories, legends, and other texts of local importance. According to Glassberg (quoting Wallace Stegner), "No place is a place until the things that have happened there are remembered in history ... yarns, legends, or monuments" (116). When the storied history combines with the evidence of proper history , it creates a more complex notion of the past.

A reader who picks up *White Rapids* expecting the work to be fully fictional should begin to ask questions when faced with reconstructions of historical documents, as the detail on these pages throughout the text far outweighs the level of detail on the more stylized pages such as the example below when the town enters initial planning.

Blanchet P. (2007) *White Rapids* (Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly) (no pagination)

In the image above, unlike the precision of the map scene, the lines of the image, along with the stylized text, point more towards the Art Deco stylings that would have been popular at the point in history when these scenes occur. Further, unlike the map, there is likely no historical image to capture precisely what was happening at this very moment.

As the story continues, the reader sees that the frustrated architect has to cope with an unrealistic deadline, but when the elevations for the homes are shown, they once again correspond with the actual town (and readers can view images on http://www.lerapideblanc.com/). The juxtaposition between fact and fiction creates a liminal space in which readers are invited to play with the traces of the past, negotiating for themselves the lines between fact and fiction.

The contrast between artificially stylized scenes and documentary evidence shows an attempt to preserve the past as best as possible. The goal is not a full history, but a sense of history... how life was lived and how things changed over the course of the town's short life. In telling its story, even if it is exaggerated in content and style, the town persists with the presence of historical documents as both an anchor and a point where the curious reader can jump in and discover more.

A more literal line between past and present persists when the book ends. The reader is taken from the once pleasant views of the town to the moment when the announcement is made that the town will close. From this point in the text onward, there is a distinct change in tone. The images are uniformly brighter, which showcases the pulpy paper stock. The fact that these final scenes are more "gritty" matches the fact that they show the houses in a state of abandonment. In the image below, notice how the rust stains under the faucet remain as the only trace that this space was ever used.

Blanchet P. (2007) *White Rapids* (Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly) (no pagination)

These details are replayed in the other ending scenes as well, though the eye needs to pause to catch them: a light fixture removed leaving only wires exposed, a chip on the counter-top laminate, and a broken drawer handle are but some of the details revealed with closer viewing. Here, these artifacts stand as evidence of occupation, slight as they may be.

By showing these closing scenes in a more realistic, gritty manner, Blanchet highlights the importance of the trace. The rust stains and other minutia are historical documents of a sort. While the house drawn here may well be one of the many torn down by the power company, its abandoned state points to the presence of the past... a past that has not completely vanished, and a past that will persist, at least in storied form, to invite the reader to play among its fragments.

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Scott Pilgrim's Permeable Little Boundaries

by Gabriela Meján

> *"wish i could go back in time and take out all the 'dumb stuff' in scott pilgrim so i could show you how SERIOUS it was always meant to be"* (O'Malley, 2011: no pagination)

What I find most compelling in *Scott Pilgrim* is how an uncertain world of permeable boundaries is constantly built, even in those sequences that would not seem like crucial narrative events.

A WHILE MORE DRUNKER
YOU GUYS, SERIOUSLY
I SERIOUSLY LOVE YOU
WHAT TIME IS IT?
IS IT HOME TIME?
SHUT UP, SCOTT
I SERIOUSLY WISH I COULD LIKE BE YOU, RAMONA
I MEAN, YOU'RE SO Y'KNOW?
Smek
KIM PINE, WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN ALL MY LIFE?
MAKE OUT?

O'Malley, B. L., (2010) *Scott Pilgrim vs. the Universe* (London: Fourth Estate Ltd, 97)

In this page, the large vertical panel sets a precedent, the caption: "A while more drunker" works together with the drop spilt on the bottleneck. The characters have lost the sense of temporality -"Is it home time?" Scott wonders- along with the ability to speak clearly verifiable in both the speech balloons with fuzzy edges and the drunk talk that, even if only for a moment, turns their roles a bit blurry: who are the couple and who is the third wheel here? All of these elements are what I mean by permeable boundaries. I will deconstruct each one of them hoping to help demonstrate how "SERIOUS" indeed this is meant to be.

As Will Eisner asserts, balloons are "given the task of adding meaning and conveying the character of sound to the narrative" (1985: 27). It's not only fuzzy balloons that convey meaning in this page but how the first and the last panels are linked by the use of tailless balloons. In both cases, the speakers are invisible. Not entirely though. The sequence enables the reader to construe "the full picture". In the last panel for instance, Ramona talks in amorous reciprocity to Kim while Scott fuels his own fantasy by encouraging the girls to "make out!"

It is throughout this concatenation of dialogues that roles are a bit blurred out. A key point to this page's dynamism is the word '**BE**' (panel 4). This playful swap of identities is like a glimpse of a comedy of intrigue, where characters give up their assigned role in order to create a diffuse, dream like reality where, at least for a while (a panel, a page), the natural order is altered. So each character is, in itself, a permeable boundary.

In addition, Scott Pilgrim, widely known sober, is stumbling drunk not simply with tequila but "Tequila José Cuervo Especial" (panel 1). This realistically depicted bottle gained presence in Toronto thanks to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Mexico, Canada and the U.S. signed in 1994 to bring down barriers to the movement of goods along these territories.

However, as Patricia M. Goff asserts, this treaty does not sound the "death knell" for national borders, it rather means "that borders are present but permeable" and this has caused some States to respond by "reinforcing the invisible or conceptual borders held in place by cultural particularity, by collective identity, and by the common understandings that underpin a distinctive political community" (2000: 533). The tequila label bearing the wax seal, medals, logo, brand, type and signature is precisely a strengthened or "reinforced" Mexican icon.

Following Goff's idea, this page shows a "conceptual border" not because it's representative of a deep cultural juxtaposition. Quite the opposite, it simply depicts two Canadians and a New Yorker drunk in legally imported, official Mexicanity. Carlos Monsiváis got it right when he pointed out that NAFTA's aim had nothing to do with cultural exchange and it is not accurate to identify these examples as a "mexicanization" of North America. This is rather: "a sense of increasing familiarity and acceptance of the Other's [Mexicans], from phrases and songs to cooking styles" (1999: 620).

Also thanks to NAFTA professional workers of the three countries where enabled to get work permits (easier). U.S. citizen Ramona works in Canada delivering Amazon.ca parcels using two means

of transportation: rollerblades and sub-space highways. You may be wondering what rollerblades are. However sub-space, the videogame-like alternate reality, used by characters for fast-travel, is the issue of utmost concern here. In order to keep her deliveries up-to-date Ramona has been accessing sub-space mainly through Scott's mind, who is, in consequence, madly in love with her.

Scott must defeat all of Ramona's evil exes. They found each other and formed a League when Gideon, the evilest of them, got **drunk** and posted an ad on *Craiglist... Craiglist!* A website created to provide **local** classifieds. So in this page (panel 2) Scott is resting after fighting a robot sent by the twin "And hot. And Japanese!" exes. (O'Malley 2010: 81)

So the Internet, videogames and international relations are very well parodied "texts". The result: a satire of how in everyday circumstances, like the one in this page, concepts such as "local", "identity" or "territory", all of them key elements to the narrative's meaning, have become vague and ambiguous but, at the same time, exhaustively defined.

Exploring Scott Pilgrim's permeable little boundaries is arguably a fun, gripping way of reading our own leaky, deterritorialised reality.

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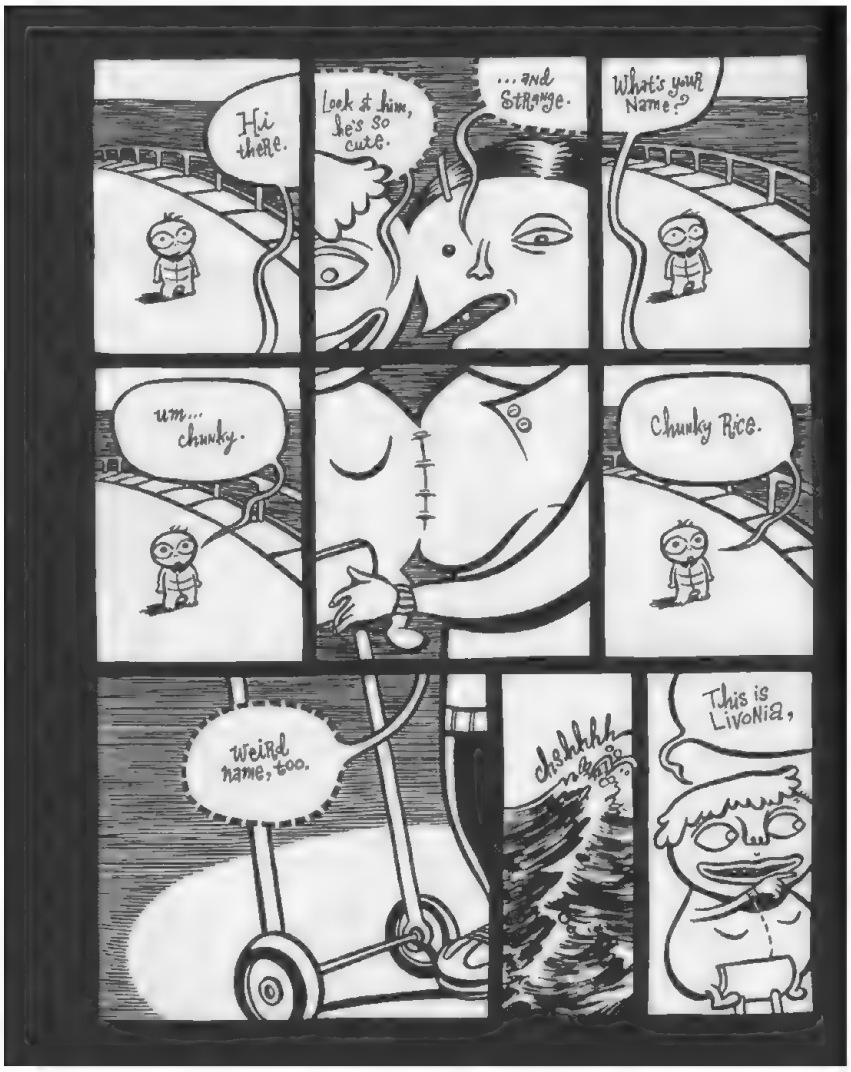
Crossword of emotions: Craig Thompson's *Chunky Rice*

by Esther Claudio



Thompson, C. (2003) *Goodbye, Chunky Rice* (Marietta, GA: Top Shelf) (no pagination)

Craig Thompson's *Goodbye, Chunky Rice* (2003) is a beautiful story about loss, memory, and human relationships. The protagonist, Chunky, is a turtle who must leave behind his one and only love, Dandel, to sail away. The reasons or the place where he is heading to are unknown, but they do not matter – the separation, the good-bye, the emptiness that the other leaves inside oneself are the key issues here.

In this page, we have one of the comic's weirdest characters: conjoined twins, sisters fused at the trunk, beheld for the first time through Chunky's puzzled gaze. In this "crossword" of panels, the architecture of the page negotiates the possible reading itineraries and reveals the mechanisms of graphic storytelling. As we will see, the sisters' panels become the intersection between the possible various readings (vertical/horizontal, narrative/descriptive, temporal/timeless, dialogue/contemplation).

The *mise en page* here works as a kind of window that allows to see through (the twins) and that, simultaneously, reflects the observer (Chunky). Chunky exchanges some words with the sisters, and while the conversation develops, the viewpoint shifts from Chunky's (looking amazed at the strange creature) to the sisters' themselves (looking at Chunky). The conversation unfolds horizontally, reading from left to right, and images of the sister's bodies are inserted in it, so the dialogue and the observation blend.

However, it is the contemplation of the conjoined twins, not the conversation, that becomes the focus of attention here. The images of the sisters draw our look down and, consequently, the horizontality of the panels is overshadowed by the verticality of the character's portrait. Somehow, the graphic discourse here deployed takes over the dialogue. In fact, this vertical sequence is placed in the centre of the page and, although the rest of panels overlap it, the full figure of the twins, as a whole, stands out from the rest.

The way chronology and narration mingle in this page is also interesting. As Thomas A. Bredehoft states in his article about the architecture of comics, "all but the simplest narratives have some fairly complicated relationship between two kinds of sequentiality: the sequence of ... chronology and ... the narrative line" (872) and this page from *Chunky Rice*, narrates / describes two simultaneous actions – the dialogue and the mutual observation.

Thus, the sisters' horizontal portrayal is carried out step by step, as if they were chopped and mixed with images of Chunky. On the contrary, their vertical portrayal provides the whole picture of their body and the descriptive function impose on the narrative one. In so doing, the chronology is also renegotiated, for the description imposes a non-time that escapes from the narratological rhythm of the dialogue. Therefore, the small instant that would last this first impact is elongated and leaves the reader floating in a kind of timeless chronology. The bubble bursts when the sea wave breaks, in the penultimate panel, and the beat goes on.

The page layout is one of the most unique features of comics, and Thompson's works present and intricate design which, at times, focuses more on sensation than on narration. In fact, the question in this page is: how to transmit the feeling, the impact of a first impression? (especially when one beholds such an extraordinary being). Such a clever page layout in this and many other instances in Thompson's works gives a glimpse of a characteristic taste for description that normally serves to communicate feelings and sensations in a poetic and very personal style. Chris Ware stated once that,

most of the time, he did comics "trying to get at some kind of feeling" (quoted in Raeburn 11). The transmission of emotions is one of the main functions of comics for Thompson too and his works are very personal stories, maps of emotional geography.

Beyond aesthetics, the conjoined sisters work as a kind of paradoxical chorus about the subject matter – the two protagonists' separation. In *Goodbye, Chunky Rice*, almost every character undergo a loss. For instance, the ship captain, Charles, cannot forget his wife, Glenda, who died long ago. Another character, Solomon, lost his dog, Stomper, and his brother, who turned his back on him. And Chunky's journey entails a hurting separation from his beloved Dandel. However, the characters we are dealing with in this page, the conjoined sisters, are physically inseparable. Furthermore, if they were divided, they would die but, would they be the only ones who would suffer a mortal fate if this would happen?

As Dandel says at the end of the story, "there is no goodbye, Chunky Rice" for two people who are really close. For this reason, the comic always reminds me of Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*, when the fox looks at the wheat fields and happily remembers that, one day, somebody tamed him.

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Balloon – Kevin Huizenga

by Greice Schneider

Huizenga, K. (2008) "Balloon" *Kramers Ergot* #7 (Oakland: Buenaventura Press) (no pagination)

This page by Kevin Huizenga plays with one of the most recognizable conventions of comics language: the balloon. The metaphor of a bag inflated by air floating on the top of the page is here taken literally, at service of a poetic meta-commentary.

The story – featuring his recurrent character Glenn Ganges – was first published in *Kramers Ergot* 7 (2007), in a gigantic format (16"x21") [1]. Size matters and Huizenga makes the most out of the large page by exploring the possibilities of the changes of scale in the trajectory of the 'flight' from Glenn's living room to the sky, and the distinct levels of detail that can be achieved by high altitudes; for example, the profusion of small balloons over the suburban landscape and the suggestion of height are favored by the verticality of the second tier.

Reading Huizenga's page against the grain of the concept of speech balloon may be fruitful to understand the very ambiguous and unstable nature of the comics reading. Groensteen defines the balloon as a space delimited by a trace that surrounds the words pronounced by the characters (2007: 207). Such description can be bracketed in two parts, as follows.

The first part of this definition is related to the idea that the balloon demarcates a region of the page that should not be taken as an element of the fictional space. The balloon hides parts of the image from the reader, causing what Groensteen calls an effect of concealment (2009: 70). Inside the borders, illusion is suspended and the text denounces the opacity of the page:

> [T]he cohabitation of the drawing and the balloon generates a tension, since the three-dimensional space constructed by the cartoonist is contradicted by the presence within it of this piece that is added, a stranger to the representative illusion (2009: 69)

In this page, however, Huizenga blurs this contract and emphasizes this instability of the comics language. The balloons hold an ambiguous status: they surely signal a differentiated zone, but at the same time, they also belong to the fictional universe, refusing to behave as intruding objects to be disregarded – as normally balloons do.

The second part of Groensteen's definition refers to "the words pronounced by the characters", raising a second tension between the verbal and the visual. A balloon usually points to the existence of an utterance – and, therefore, also implies the existence of a speaker. But here we have neither words, nor characters. The balloons are filled with scrawls , and apart from a brief appearance of the "hero" Glenn Ganges (perhaps just to justify the title) what is left for the reader is just an assemblage of houses, a suburban landscape viewed from above.

But even with no text, the balloon still indicates a presence of something being said, no matter how illegible. The same goes for the characters: even if we can't see them (because they are too distant), they are implied by the tail, which works as an arrow, to refer to the speaker (Fresnault-Deruelle,

1 Later on, the same page was posted on the website *What Things Do* (May 2011), with the possibility of opening the image in high resolution.

1970: 149). Despite its discreteness, the tail is considered as an important device, an intermediary between text and image, the iconic and the linguistic (Fresnault-Deruelle, 1970: 149). In Huizenga's story, the tail also occupies a double meaning, behaving not only as a sign to point to who's speaking, but also as comets' tails, in the last panel of the story.

Moreover, the absence of text inside the balloons does not mean there is no text. Huizenga goes further in his subversion of the the hierarchical conventions between the balloon and the panel (Groensteen, 2009: 68). Instead of placing text inside the balloons, Huizenga writes the lines of dialogues in the margins, surrounding the page grid.

The text is composed basically by everyday conversational patterns, a collection of sentences, chunks of expressions used to keep routine conversation going. The content lacks specificity and function more as illocutionary speech acts (Searle or Austin come to mind) – pragmatical little statements used to do things with words, such as expressing gratitude ("thanks for that"), agreement ("fine by me"), request ("come here a minute"), indifference ("oh well, whatever"), disbelief ("you can't be serious") etc. Among these sentences, the theme of memory appears as a leitmotif ("try to remember. please don't forget").

In his blog (that not coincidentally happens to be entitled *The Balloonist*) Huizenga explains that the page was inspired by Frank King's Sunday pages "involving flying up and looking down on the landscape below" (in the second panel, Huizenga even cites one of Frank King's panels, drawn from the same point of view).

King, F. (ca. 1930) *Gasoline Alley Sunday Page*, quoted by Huizenga (15 May 2011)

By playing with the multiple meanings of balloon, Huizenga positions the reader in a kind of God-like perspective, as someone who can see everyone from above and hear everything [2].

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2 Reminiscent, sometimes, of the initial scenes from Wim Wenders' film *Wings of Desire* (1987).

Harvey Pekar's Anti-epiphanic Everyday

by Tony Venezia

BUT WOULD IT BE AS INTERESTING A LIFE? MAYBE IT'D BE TOO BLAND...
BUT THEN, KNOWIN' MYSELF, I COULD ALWAYS FIND SOMETHING TO GET SHOOK UP OVER AND WRITE ABOUT. LET'S FACE IT, I'M NOT GONNA BECOME A MELLOW MAN OVER NIGHT NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS!
ABC auto Glass
OH WELL, IT'S ALL HYPOTHETICAL... THAT WOMAN DIDN'T CALL ME BACK...
SNIFF
GAS
SELF-SERVE $1.03
AH, FRESH BREAD!
THE END

Pekar, H. Crumb, R. (1996) "Hypothetical Quandary", *American Splendor presents Bob and Harv's Comics* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, p. 79)

"Hardly anything actually happens... mostly it's just people talking, or Harvey by himself, panel after panel, haranguing the hapless reader. There's not much in the way of heroic struggle, the triumph of good over evil, resolution of conflict, people overcoming great odds, stuff like that. It's kinda sorta more like real life...real in late twentieth century Cleveland as it lurches along from one day to the next."
R. Crumb (1996) "A Mercifully Short Preface"

"Many of Pekar's stories are not true stories, but the sort of anecdotes, observations and snippets of dialogue that a writer might jot down in his notebook for later use in a finished work."
Tim Kreider (2005) "Throwing the Book at Comics Artists", 191

Harvey Pekar's autobiographical everyday micronarratives are predicated on their very quotidian-ness. Describing them one runs out of adjectives to describe the comics' narrative world: mundane, ordinary, banal, normal, familiar etc. Pekar's canon of work with numerous collaborators grasps this sense of the everyday as "the landscape closest to us, the world most immediately met." (Highmore, 2002, 1). The run-of-the-mill events, occurences and ruminations were also often developed to further encompass the story of their own story-making process as Pekar sometimes worked to incorporate and transform self-reflexive commentary into the raw material of narrative. But as the competing prefatory quotations from comics artists Crumb and Kreider indicate, this defining quotidian quality can be criticised as much as celebrated.

Indeed, the very ordinariness of Pekar's work in *American Splendor* and beyond is precisely what readers seem to respond to. Leaving aside the thorny subject of what exactly constitutes a "true story", Kreider is absolutely correct to point out that Pekar's work comprises of "anecdotes, observations and snippets of dialogue", or as Crumb puts it "[h]ardly anything happens." What Pekar strived for was a poetics of the everyday, captured fleetingly as part of a constant and evolving process. To examine and illustrate this, we can look closely at one of Pekar's most celebrated collaborations with Crumb, "Hypothetical Quandary."

The strands of image and text are ingeniously entwined in this micronarrative, showing us Pekar as narrator as he leaves his house to go and buy a loaf of bread. The text is monological, represented via thought balloons that reveal the character's internal dilemma, his hypothetical quandary, reflecting on how his life would have been different if a major publisher had taken him on allowing him to write full-time (effectively removing him from everyday life and its prosaic problems and thus also his subject matter). The thought balloon is a device that allows the revelation of the interiority of a character while simultaneously locating that character within a contiguous social environment, in this case a clearly recognisable Cleveland – Pekar's hometown, and the setting for much of his work.

The story is told economically over three pages, the last of which is reproduced here. The verbal and visual threads, while distinctive, are complementary. There is a steady, rhythmic visual pulse maintained by Crumb's regular subject-to-subject and scene-to-scene transitions (see McCloud: 1994, 70-73) and enhanced by the verbal monologue. The visual style is late Crumb, more realist than the caricatures of his comix heyday. The rhythm of the language itself is based in the vernacular, the language of everyday demotic speech, a linguistic flow that captures a sense of consciousness akin to the flux of jazz tempos or stand-up comedy. The last two panels conclude with an affirmation of the sensual pleasures associated with freshly baked bread.

And that is it. The story starts and ends (the last panel even shows a classic "the end" sign). But there is of course so much more that can be said about this short piece. As this extract shows, Pekar has contributed to what Greice Schneider, in an unconscious echo of Kreider, has identified in comics as a "certain kind of work that privileges unexceptional everyday situations; stories that challenge any accurate plot description, often deprived of any special events and inhabited by characters doing nothing more than living out their own routines." (Schneider: 2010, 37).

The observations that Kreider (himself a talented political cartoonist) dismisses are returned to again and again. "The end" is never really the end – the diverse fragments that make upAmerican Splendor comprise a vast archive of the everyday. Pekar sometimes went back to revisit events and incidents he had previously narrativised, working with different artists, altering emphasis, engaging in a dialogue with prior narrations[1].

But if Kreider's criticism is misplaced, it is perhaps still possible to locate Pekar's work within a wider discourse on literary short fiction. Pekar's writing resists the lure of the epiphany, that flash of what E.L. Doctorow calls "compressive illumination" associated with the modernist short story. The term has acquired a secular meaning thanks in no small part to James Joyce, who applied the religious term for the manifestation of God to "the most delicate and evanescent of moments." (Joyce: 1944, 41). Writing in 2000, Doctorow notes that "the writers of today are drifting away from the classic model of the modern short story. They seem more disposed to the episodic than the epiphanic." (xv)

Pekar's stories are middles without beginnings or ends – they resist Aristotelian dramaturgy (a fact that annoys Kreider) by sidestepping either anagnorosis or catharsis. "Hypothetical Quandary" sets up a potential conflict, and then avoids any possible resolution or revelation. What is privileged is Bergsonian flux over the Joycean fragment[2]. They capture that sense of the contemporary everyday

1 This approach of retelling the same event in different ways emphasises both the subjectivity of memory and the processual construction and re-construction of the past as it impinges on the present. See Rocco Versaci's comparative analysis of the (re)telling of an incident from Pekar's school days in "Austere Youth" (1992, illustrated by Frank Stack) with an episode from *The Quitter* (2005, illustrated by Dean Haspiel); 67-70.

2 A more sustained reading would of course reveal how the binary of flux and fragment fractures under closer scrutiny. *American Splendor* is after all a collection of discrete if interconnected pieces that form a whole – for instructive

in late twentieth century urban environments when, as Perec put it; "nothing passes except time, people, cars and clouds."[3] This is precisely what characterises Pekar's episodic everdayness, where life lurches along one day to the next.

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comparison see short story cycles such as Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914), Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), and, of course, Will Eisner's *A Contract with God* (1978). More recent examples include Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* (1984) and Tom Humberstone's work in progress, *Ellipsis*. These texts work to problematise easy distinctions between short stories and the novel. The archetypal model for enacting and exploring the dialectic between flux and fragment remains Benjamin's monumental *Arcades Project* (2002). Thanks to Henderson Downing and Ernesto Priego for clarifying these thoughts at the panel discussion on short forms at the Flash Symposium! Shorts on Shorts at Birkbeck, University of London, May 24th 2011.

3 Cited in Schneider, 21.

Shortcomings: bridging the page-break

by Nicolas Labarre

Shortcomings, Adrian Tomine's 2007 graphic novel, which was originally published in *Optic Nerve* (9-11), is simple and classical in its construction and page composition. The book depicts the relationships between Ben Tanaka, his girlfriend Miko Hayashi and his lesbian confident Alice Kim, in three chapters and 108 pages.

Throughout the graphic novel, Tomine divides his pages into three layers, each comprising two or three isomorphic panels. This classicism is also at work within the panels themselves, where black and white figures, usually framed from the chest up are rendered realistically, in precise brushwork. Some of the potentialities of the medium are thus voluntarily downplayed, the better to emphasize Tomine's main subject: his characters, delineated by dialogue and body language.

However, while creating regularities and driving the medium toward a "transparency" that makes it easier to engage with its narrative and characters, Tomine controls the rhythm of his sequences through unobtrusive, efficient, and at times unusual devices. Consider for example the following panel, which serves to establish a new scene on page 17.

Tomine, A. (2007) *Shortcomings* (London: Faber and Faber, 17, 7)

The onomatopoeia and the black spoon direct the reader toward the hands, drawn in Tomine's typical disconnected brushwork, then to the rolled-up black sleeves (a careful reader will remember having seen this sweater in a previous scene, worn by Miko). Added details in the background suffice

to place the scene in a private kitchen as opposed to a restaurant, thus distancing it from the locale of the previous scene, which depicts a conversation in the street.

In addition to the change of location, the change in scale, the foregrounding of objects and details, as opposed to a character's face, signals a disjunction. In each panel of the four pages leading to this picture, the face of at least two of the characters, Ben and Alice, are clearly visible. In other other words, although this panel could be something else than an "establishing shot"[1], it unmistakably signals the beginning of a new scene in this context.

However, this discontinuity does not coincide with the page break.

I TRY TO STUDY, BUT ALL I CAN THINK ABOUT ARE THE INCOMING FRESHWOMYN.
THE WHAT?
THE FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS. THAT'S WHAT THEY'RE CALLED.
ARE YOU SERIOUS?
THAT'S WHAT THEY'RE CALLED.
OKAY, OKAY...
SIGH! THEY'RE SO CUTE AND NAIVE. MY GOAL IS TO AT LEAST MAKE OUT WITH A HUNDRED GIRLS BY THE TIME I GET MY PH.D.
JESUS! I TOLD YOU NOT TO GO TO MILLS FOR GRAD SCHOOL. YOU'RE TOO WEAK!
WELL, WE ALL HAVE OUR PRIORITIES...
USED
OPEN
PSSHHH
17

Tomine, A. (2007) *Shortcomings* (London: Faber and Faber, 17)

1 The phrase is unfortunate, since it conflates film and comics, however, comic criticism vocabulary does not seem to have a valid equivalent for it.

Early in the book, Tomine makes a creative use of the page break, as the first page of Shortcomings is revealed to be a film within the graphic novel. The break enables Tomine to circumvent the fact that the flatness of the comic book page is analogous to that of the movie screen, and even to exploit this ambiguity. Because the panel of an audience watching the film belongs to a separate page, our reading of the first page is literal. We engage with the action and the characters without suspecting that they belong to an altogether different narrative from the one we are about to read.

What is then the benefit of having the establishing panel on page 17 as the last panel of the page, rather than as the first of page 18?

First, this physical closeness serves a narrative purpose. It connects this new scene to the previous panel, and the composition emphasizes that connection, with its emphasis on corresponding horizontal lines. Ben's line of sight directs us toward the PSSHHH, the black area in panel five is aligned with the upper edge of the wok, and thanks to what Thierry Groensteen would call iconic solidarity ("solidarité iconique"), the line "We all have our priorities" comes to be understood as foreshadowing the content of the new scene and potentially applying to Miko as well (1999: 21-133).

From the early- 20th century Sunday pages to *Tintin* to structuralists analysis of comics, the notion of the comic page as a unit has been central to our conception of the medium. The academic habit of reproducing single pages (or two adjacent pages) is a reflection of this consensus regarding the significance of the page as an aesthetic and narrative unit.

As seen in the opening sequence, Tomine makes use of these structural possibilities, but he also reveals them to be conventional in nature: the scene shift remains perfectly legible, even when placed in such an unconventional site. Thereafter, whenever discontinuities are introduced in the book, they become more meaningful because they are not perceived as the application of a rule, but as deliberate choices.

In addition to its efficient unconventionality, this choice also helps construe *Shortcomings* as a legitimate cultural object, as it deemphasizes suspense and episodic construction within the chapters even though suspense is used and even emphasized between chapters. Rightfully or not, seriality itself is seen as the stigma of popular fiction and using the page break to create suspense is one of the ways in which graphic novels resemble serialized comics. The convention of the last-panel suspense (*Tintin*, *Spirou*, *The Authority*, etc.), suggests a partial isomorphy between the comic page and the episode in a series. The spatial and temporal discontinuity between consecutive pages (or spreads) is indeed analogous to the discontinuity existing between consecutive installments of serialized fiction, albeit in a condensed form. As indicated by Pierre Fresnault-Deruelle, readers have long internalized the last-panel suspense convention (1976: 14-15), which suggests that most comics could be characterized as paraliterature, an array of work in which suspense structures the narrative (Couégnas 1992:149).

By stressing continuity and unity at the expense of suspense, Tomine distances himself from this stigma. Cliffhangers are used before the objective gap between installments and not in the course of

the chapters themselves. In the collected edition, a title page and a blank page are inserted between chapters, materializing the narrative break with a literal pause.

Suspense is not absent either at the end of page 18: the panel itself is too sparse to prevent the creation of tension between the two pages, but crucially, it does not ask any question. This minimizing of suspense, this severance of the link with seriality, aligns *Shortcomings* with legitimate literature, especially in collected form. The book's subject matter, its playful use of different modes of representation, its length, its paratext (a blurb quoting Nick Hornby, a novelist, who writes that "Reading a comic book suddenly becomes as rewarding as reading good contemporary fiction"), it's physical form, all suggest the ambition realize the promises of the "graphic novel". The structural elements also contribute efficiently toward that goal.

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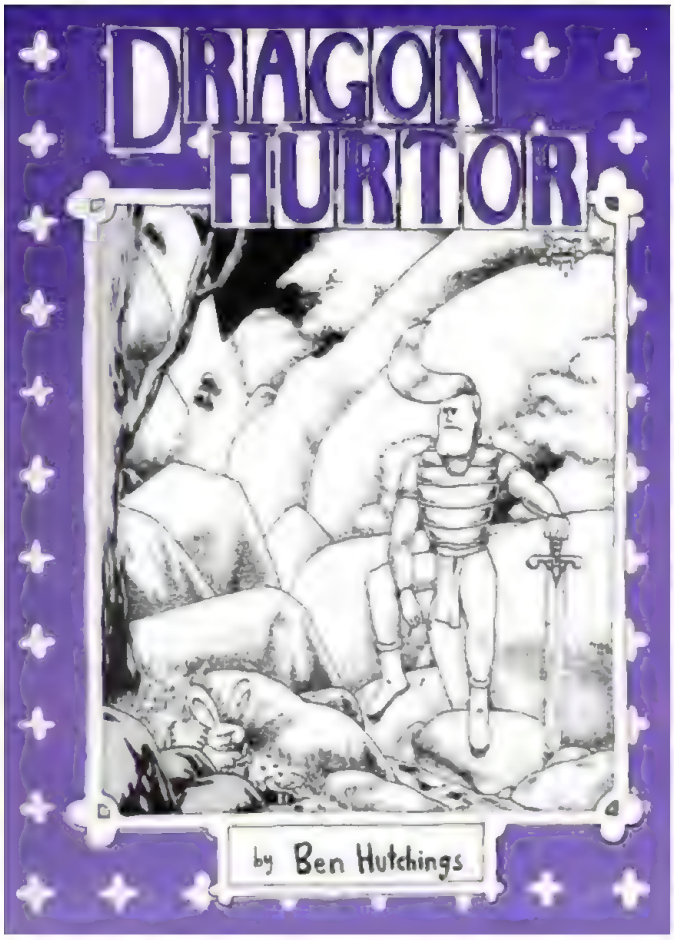
Dragon Hurtor: A Hero's Tale, Satire and a Touch of Scatology

by Michael Hill



Hutchings, B. (1996) *Dragon Hurtor* #1 (Wanniassa, ACT: Geeen Comix, front cover)

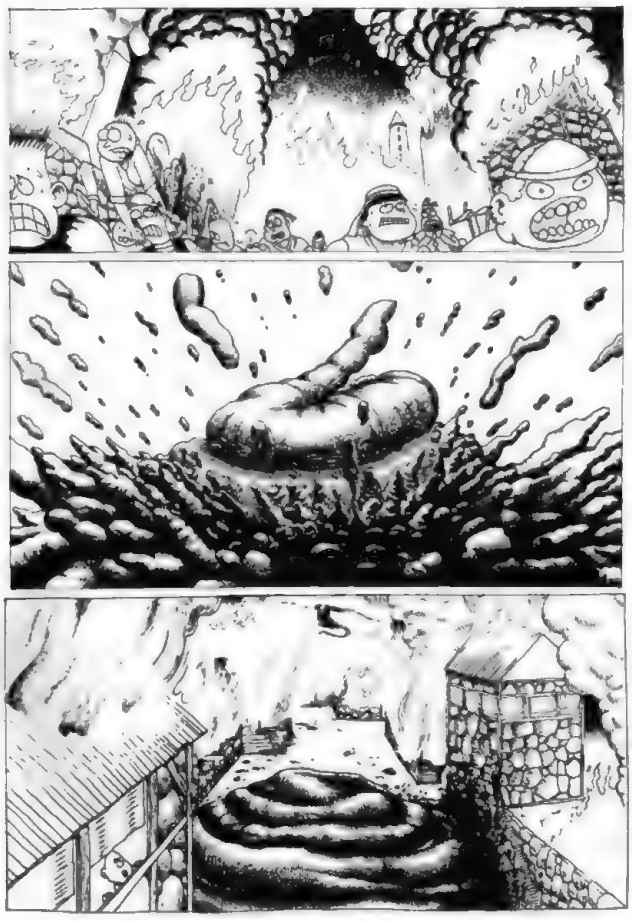
Australian alternative comics creator Ben Hutchings' *Dragon Hurtor* reads like a parody of an action hero comic. Hired to fight dragons monstering a village the character design of the hero is not so much Beowulfian as something of a pastiche in its humorous visualisation of the heroic figure. He wears armour and carries a sword but his hair has a ludicrous, gravity-defying wave. His chin is of the doubly determined and pronounced variety for which he is ridiculed and called "bum-chin" by one of the villagers.

Bereft of the influence of a Jack Kirby or Joe Kubert this hero's stature is more fragile, a send-up of their character designs of Hulk and Tor respectively, for Marvel, and constructed with a frailness of line that, whilst sporting some bodybuilding, lacks the appearance of a steroid-fed musculature.

This understatement or lack provides an ironic effect. Hutchings' intention is obviously to be funny. On the other hand, Joe Kubert, in addition to being a longstanding creator and illustrator of bodies in comics, runs his own school that teaches drawing for the comics industry. His instructional approach requires the study of anatomy and drawing from life rather than from comics[1].

Compared with the Marvel manual Dragon Hurtor's design is a joke, a mocking imitation of the super hero figure as proposed by Stan Lee and John Buscema:

> ...the superhero is larger, with broader shoulders, more muscular arms and legs, a heavier chest, and even a more impressive stance...a superhero simply has to look more impressive, more dramatic, more imposing than an average guy. (Lee and Buscema 1977: 46)



Hutchings, B. (1996) *Dragon Hurtor #1* (Wanniassa, ACT: Geeen Comix) (no pagination)

1 Joe Kubert describes his School and the teaching of drawing for a career in comics in a lengthy discussion with Gary Groth ("Joe Kubert: An Interview by Gary Groth", *The Comics Journal* #172 November 1994, pp.58-104.

Applying the requisite attributes outlined by Peter Coogan, namely being on a mission, having special powers, a secret identity and distinctive dress, *Dragon Hurtor* does not qualify as a superhero. He is more of a warrior, and a renegade one at that. (Heer and Worcester 2009: 77)

In the three-panel page shown above, a dragon attacks the village and its inhabitants scorching both with its fiery breath and depositing a giant pile of excrement in the main street. Hutchings represents the villagers in simple, cartoon style, all wild-eyed and open-mouthed with beads of sweat on their faces, running in panic towards the front of the panel, facing and confronting the reader for whom it is intended to be more amusing than frightening.

On the other hand, the architecture and the excrement are given much more detail and penmanship. This seems to fit McCloud's description of the combination of cartoon-style characters overlaid over a more realistically-rendered background (McCloud 1994: 42-43). The dropping plops in spectacular fashion with little droplets flying out toward the edges of the panel and onto the reader before settling with the effects of gravity into a stinking, sinking mound amidst the burning buildings. Here the action-hero comics narrative is turned on its head with humorous intent in its celebration of the scatological content.

In terms of comics storytelling the layout of this page almost fits Ivan Brunetti's notion of the democratic grid:

> By "democratic," I am referring to a grid of panels that are all exactly the same size, from which we can infer their equal weight and value in the "grand scheme" of the page. We can also think of this type of grid as an "invisible template"; it does not call immediate attention to itself, but invites us to an unimpeded narrative flow, acting as a living "calendar" of events, sweeping or microscopic. The democratic grid need not be uninteresting or undistinguished; with a spirited approach, it can be the apotheosis of elegance, simplicity and sophistication.
> (Brunetti 2007: 51)

Brunetti's approach to cartooning provides a more appropriate stage for Hutchings' visual antics than any by Marvel. In this comic Hutchings delivers humour and silliness rather than awesome heroics.

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Vishwajyoti Ghosh's homage to Anant Pai

by Nina Mickwitz

Anant Pai, who died in Mumbai in February 2011 at the age of 81, is known as the founding father of Indian comics. He originated *Amar Chitra Katha*, or Immortal Illustrated Stories, in 1967 after having worked in a managerial position at Indrajal Comics, an imprint importing and distributing titles such as *The Phantom*, *Flash Gordon* and *Mandrake*.

The first *Amar Chitra Katha* comics were based on Western fairytales, but issue #11, *Krishna* (1969-70), indicated the future direction for the series which overall has sold some 100 million copies to date. Pai's proclaimed aim was to teach children about India's history, cultural heritage and the Hindu epics, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, vividly illustrating how "[s]erialization as a later variant more closely linked to print, film and other taped media shares much of the formulaic, yet revivifying, nature of older oral forms" (Orr, 2003: 143).

While critics, such as Nandini Chandra (Fernandes, 2008) have pointed to problems involved in the ACK output, including stereotypes in the portrayal of Muslims, Pai considered himself working for the cultural 'integration' of India. Known to his readers as 'uncle Pai', he engaged with them and invited their contributions through a question and answer forum in the educational comics magazine *Tinkle*. 'His impact was incalculable in creating a national historical consciousness among India's kids, though one could debate the nature of that consciousness' said Abhijit Gupta, professor of English at Jadhavpur University (Raghav 2011).

Ghosh, V. (2011) "...and then came Uncle Pai" (New Delhi: *Platform Creative Lifestyle*, p.2)

Vishwajyoti Ghosh's graphic novel *Delhi Calm* was published by HarperCollins Publishers India in 2010. Ghosh offers a three page tribute to 'uncle Pai' on his blog. The image above is the second page of the comic, first published in the May/ June 2011 issue of the Indian magazine *Platform*. Ghosh combines his narrative of personal memory with collaged imagery from ACK comics in a way which emphasises the significance the comics held for him and his friends through boy-hood, and indeed for his future career as a comics writer and artist.

Smith and Watson (2002: 21) outline a model of four key ways to 'texture the interface' of auto-biographical telling when utilising text and image combinations:

> (1) relationally, through parallel or interrogatory juxtaposition of word and image;
> (2) contextually, through documentary or ethnographic juxtaposition of word and image;
> (3) spatially, through palimpsest or paratextual juxtaposition of word and image;
> and (4) temporally, through telescoped or serial juxtaposition of word and image

He "situate[s his] individual 'I' in a cultural surround' (Smith and Watson, 2002: 25) by 'commemorat[ing] or revalu[ing] a past moment and link[ing] the personal to a community" (ibid: 26). Comics mobilise relational, spatial and temporal juxtaposition of word and image as a form, but what Ghosh's pages creatively bring to the fore here is the contextual interface. The identification with the heroic characters in the ACK comics is shown as permeating memories of the everyday life of childhood and acting as a communal frame of reference beyond it. The relational juxtaposition of personal narrative with the imagery of ACK comics mobilises the unique capacity of the comics page architecture, or scaffolding, of multiple and simultaneous layers of signification and ellipsis, with plentiful opportunities for readers to produce meaning.

The way the comics take on a central position in the lives of Ghosh and his school friends is indicated visually by images of school boys and comics characters being used interchangeably, while the words in insets and speech bubbles anchor the story in remembered experience. A school boy crush for a female teacher is implied in a verbal exchange comparing her to a legendary heroine. The 'borrowed' images (panels 4 and 6), however, lends lyrical depth and emotional charge which reaches far beyond the brief exchange between the boys.

In panel 5 a boy, wistfully musing about becoming a comics creator (Ghosh, retrospectively expressing a desire we now witness having come to fruition), is interrupted by an assemblage of comics characters charging towards the book store owner/ reader with the exuberance of young boys excited by the prospect of more vicarious adventures.

It seems that the slippages between registers (between word and image, present and past, imagined and remembered) present the reader with a far more encompassing image than the sum total

of the images and words of the actual page. As Belting (2005: 312) insists, *image* is framed by both medium and body. That is:

> [i]mages are neither on the wall (or on the screen) nor in the head alone. They do not exist by themselves, but they happen; they take place whether they are moving images (where this is so obvious) or not. They happen via transmission and perception.
> (ibid)

The *quotation* Ghosh performs is worthy of closer inspection. His use of images from old comics features artwork by the illustrators who worked for ACK. Artists contributing to the visual signature of ACK (including Ram Waeerkar, Dilip Kadam, Souren Roy, Chandrakant D. Rane, Geoffrey Fowler and Pratap Mullick) collectively and in their collaged form here become a homage to the man whose vision brought these comics to their readerships and made them be treasured by generations of Indian children. Their anonymity in this context points to the contradictory role of producers of comics art-work historically, and in particular in contexts of production-stables (in the mould of the studio systems in cinematic production) and publication which foreground titles, as opposed to the authorial comics and graphic novel mode exemplified by Ghosh himself.

Although not always given their deserved recognition, it is the characters and imagery of the artists which come to embody the stories in crystallised form, and persist as a rich source and springboard for imagination and creativity, here materialising in the form of quotation. As Orr (2003: 134) suggests and Ghosh elegantly demonstrates, quotation 'as reference point and referential process ... [has a] singular ability to merge or conjoin the previously separate for mutual and future enhancement'.

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Asterix and the Brussels Sprouts

by Jeff Albertson

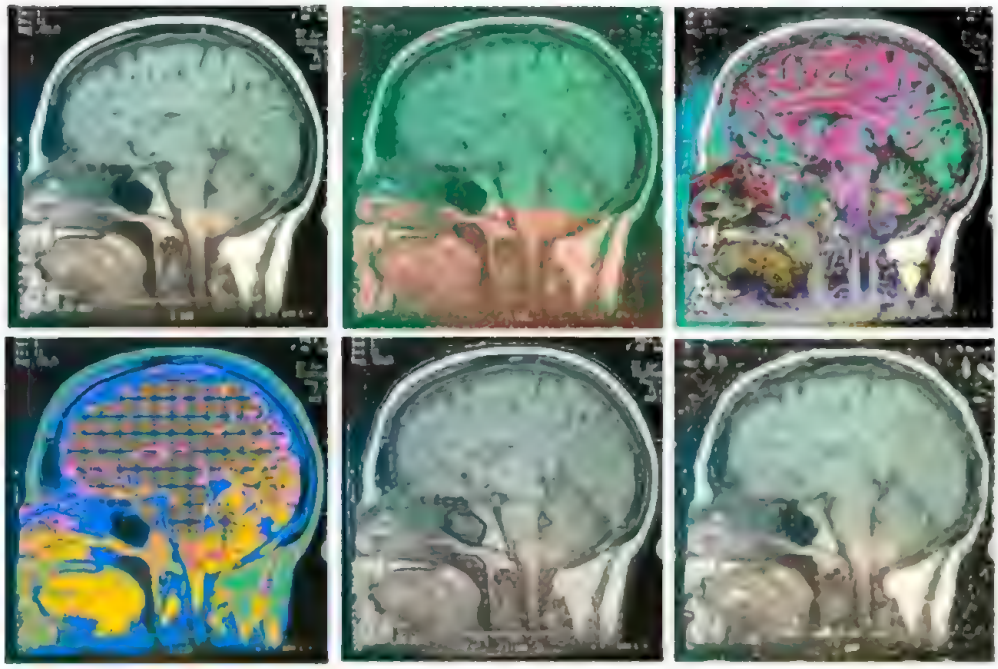
It is certainly a promising sign for comic art studies that scientific disciplines have started to develop an interest for them. Such is the case of a recent and indeed widely publicized article published by Acta Neurochirurgica and authored by Drs. Marcel Kamp, Philip Slotty, Sevgi Sarikaya-Seiwert, Hans-Jakob Steiger and Daniel Hängi, "Traumatic brain injuries in illustrated literature: experience from a series of over 700 head injuries in the Asterix comic books".

This neurological research group studied every head injury in the Asterix albums, detailing their assorted consequences; usually impairment of consciousness, skull fracture and compression of pupils (Kamp, Slotty et al., 2011: 1351). They discovered that, strangely, none of the injured lost his or her life (apparently gender violence was not unknown in the Roman era), or had any serious loss of conscience, like entering a coma. This could only be due to two factors; one, people had stronger skulls during the Roman era; and two, in some cases they used a particular kind of drug, euphemistically known as "the magic potion": a certain kind of muscle enhancer with curative powers.

We seldom find more useful examples of interdisciplinarity; by applying the scientific principles of neurology to a comic book, two conclusions can be reached in two completely different areas, the humanistic and the scientific. The first one, that Asterix is the most realistic piece of historic fiction written in the 20th century; the second, that future scientific research on the subject may throw a light upon the ingredients used to produce the drug that was used in Gaul, during the Roman era, to avoid traumatic brain injuries (and to have fun bashing the brains out of people you dislike).

Material and Methods

However, interdisciplinarity can also imply the reverse process: applying the methods of comics studies to science, which reminds me of a recent discovery by an international research team led by Drs Roberto Bartual and Ernesto Priego. Drs. Bartual and Priego have been funded by Sotheby's to conduct laboratory research on the authorship and market value of a series of mysterious pieces of art in their catalogue, one of which we will proceed to discuss next.



Falk, J. (2005) "My Brain on MRI"

Results and Discussion

The heavy pixelation of some panels and the unfathomable verbal contents of the page (indecipherable for most humanities scholars) point to some sort of biological scan, but instead of jumping to this apparently obvious conclusion, Drs. Bartual and Priego decided, with the help of their team, to confront the data with the principles of semiotic research. If Sotheby's intention was to sell this piece, then it must be art; and if it is art, then it must follow a certain set of stylistic conventions and meanings. Although these six panels show a clear tendency towards abstraction, the way they are organized in the page suggest they must be "read" in sequence. It would not be the first time a comic artist or a painter conceives an abstract comic.

In fact, Cy Twombly's "Nine discourses on Commodus", (Guggenheim Bilbao) which is in fact a homage to Asterix (it depicts the effects of Emperor Commodus head being bashed by a Gaul), uses a similar multiple-panel grid structure that characterizes Sotheby's abstract comic. This structure, the lack of definition of the images and Twombly's characteristic repetition of the same motif, allowed this research team (with a groundbreaking contribution from Dr Antonio Venezia) to attribute this work of art to this painter.

A close examination of the panels gave this team of comics scholars the clue to the meaning of this sequence; these apparently biological forms, contracting and expanding themselves as the sequence progresses, have a striking resemblance with a cabbage, or to be more precise, with a Brussels sprout, giving the sequence an obvious referential meaning: a clear allusion to Tintin, the greatest achievement of Belgian culture since the invention of the aforementioned vegetable.

Twombly, C. (1963) "Nine Discourses on Commodus", as scanned and shared by Derik A. Badman

Of course, there are scholars that have objected to these flirtations between humanistic and properly scientific sciences. Drs. Marcel Kamp, Philipp Slotty, Sevgi Sarikaya-Seiwert, Hans-Jakob Steiger and Daniel Hängi's article about Asterix has been criticized for taking data from a work of fiction and giving it a treatment we should only give to events in our "real", physical world. To sum up, these researchers have been criticized for confusing fact and fiction, real people with made-up characters, a critique performed by well-known members of the scholar community. Even scarier is the fact that a general misunderstanding of the unserious nature of the article has been used as an example of the kind of "serious" research that should not be allocated any private or public funding. Since any four-year-old kid, even before learning how to read and write, can easily understand that it is impossible to be thrown a rock in the head without being harmed, the fact that not only one but five grown-up scientists, working in Heinrich-Heine-University in Dusseldorf, mistake reality and fiction should make us conclude that University education in Germany must be below the level of kindergarten.

Conclusions

The fact that, unlike a kindergarten student, these five people can actually read and write, makes me cherish some doubts about this hypothesis. And what is more, they certainly can write better than most scholars; they seem to be in total command of two of the rhetorical devices that make the difference between good and bad writing (or thinking): sense of irony and sense of humor. The author sincerely recommends anybody unable to perceive the irony in the following statements, to undergo a brain scan in order to check if the contents of their heads are vegetal:

> All thirty-four Asterix comic books were screened for TBIs [Traumatic Brain Injuries]. For each head-injured character, a detailed Neurological examination was estimated

> and signs of TBI, like raccoon eyes, Battle's sign, and subgaleal hematoma, were recorded (Kamp, Slotty et al., 2011: 1352). Male gender, Roman sociocultural background, and loss of the helmet during traumata were risk factors for severe initial impairment of consciousness.
> (Kamp, Slotty et al., 2011: 1354)

It's easy to understand that much of the confusion recently produced in comics scholarship by the publication of this article has a lot to do with the inferiority complex our research area still suffers. We are still too prone to adopt a defensive posture against any "intrusion" from other fields of the science, interpreting these "intrusions" as jokes on our subject of study or considering them based on a serious misunderstanding of the nature of fiction.

However, the parody of academic writing these German neurologists perpetrated shows more understanding of popular culture than most of the academic essays written in the field of comics, and it also reminds us of something very important: every humanistic or scientific researcher has the responsibility of writing veraciously, but also the responsibility of critical reading, in order determine what is being said in a literal manner and what is being said in an indirect manner. Irony is an attribute of intelligence, and in being so, it should be considered a perfectly valid characteristic of academic writing too.

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On order and chaos in Brian Chippendale's *Ninja*

by Kathleen Dunley

This is part of a rough but growing idea about Brian Chippendale's work and notions of chaos.

Brian Chippendale, a member of the formative Fort Thunder collective out of Providence, Rhode Island, published *Ninja* in 2006. The work combines various episodes across various media—paneled comics, collages, and what resembles Chippendale's poster art more than traditional comic narrative.

Like Chippendale's earlier work for publications like *Paper Rodeo* and other comics from the Providence underground, Ninja's seemingly chaotic structure belies a sense of narrative order. A look at "Episode 68," for example, shows a sense of structure that best matches the informational view of chaos. According to N. Katherine Hayles, summarizing the ideas of chaos theorist Claude Shannon, "Shannon intimated that disorder could be seen in positive terms as the presence of information, rather than simply as the absence or order" (306). The notion of informational presence is key.

Chippendale, B. (2006) *Ninja* (California: Ginko) (no pagination)

On this page, taken out of context as it is, there appears to be a collection of three narratives: those with the black spiral backgrounds that indicate some sort of torture scene; those torture scenes with the white background that appear to have a different character; those torture scenes with a black background with yet another character, and those scenes that may loosely be described as peace within the chaos. These latter scenes include the classroom scene and the gas station scene in row four, and the couple watching TV in row seven.

The pacing here is key. The first row of panels begins the situation as the man with a briefcase approaches the prisoner in the chair. While the reader does not immediately know what is meant by "release the truth," the second row of panels cuts to two unrelated scenes of torture. When we return to the prisoner, we realize that his "torture" is much milder—a knife to his finger.

The scene cuts again, this time to a happier vision of the man in a field of flowers and hugging a woman. The details of these happier images initially look different at first glance since the man being tortured wears a mane of leaves. This visual disjuncture makes it hard to tell whether he is the same man from the happier scenes, or whether he is someone different.

Either way, the information is relatable. The pain of one situation is soothed somewhat by the two panels of more peaceful information. When the scene cuts back in the second panel of the third row, we see the act of torture fulfilled before cutting to another scene—a man waiting by the phone and an image of a cat. Again, this represents an essential pause, or a beat, between the first torture scene and the next one where we clearly see the man has lost all of his fingers.

The structure of beats and pauses that both intersect and interrupt the main storyline may look like chaos, visually speaking; however, looking at the episode in context, each piece has a relation to the whole. The pauses function as a visual relief from the harder-to-view torture scenes, thus making their reappearance more vivid as the story continues. In this case, the more information added, the more poignant the central scenes.

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California Gothic: Jaime Hernandez's *Ghost of Hoppers*

by Tony Venezia

Hernandez, J. (2006) *Ghost of Hoppers* (Seattle: Fantagraphics), 60

In Jaime Hernandez's *Ghost of Hoppers* Chicana punk Maggie Chascarillo returns briefly to the Southern California town of her youth, Huerta (the "Hoppers" of the title). Momentarily distracted, she loses her way in the streets where she grew up, and even appears threatened by a mysterious figure. The experience is disorienting and disturbing, and has an uncanny quality. *Ghost of Hoppers* finds the popular *Love and Rockets* regular in a state of disequilibrium, perturbed by aging and increasingly alienated from family, friends and lovers. She eventually finds some temporary comfort in her continuing friendships, especially with Hopey, but not before several curious episodes such as the one reproduced in the above excerpt.

Sigmund Freud popularised the trope of the uncanny (via Ernst Jentsch), illustrating the concept by recounting an anecdote about getting lost in a provincial Italian town and always, inadvertently, returning to the brothel quarter (Freud, 359)[1]. The phenomenon of unintended recurrence provoking a sensation of helplessness and uncanniness (*Unheimlich*) is achieved via the interpenetration of the familiar with the strange, and the non-recognition of that which is hidden and brought to light. Although Maggie is in an environment that ought to be familiar, the result is much the same; the feeling of discomfort and disorientation emphasised by the visual shifts in scale and perspective.

Freud is careful to note that the uncanny in fiction differs from the experience of the analysand, adding that it is "a much more fertile province than the uncanny in real life, for it contains the whole of the latter, and something more besides." (Freud, 374). He goes onto say that writing located predominantly in the fantastic, such as fairy stories, exhibit no uncanny traits, while those that present a "world of common reality" achieve the uncanny by bringing about events that never or rarely occur (Freud, 374) – something we can clearly see in the page reproduced here.

Admittedly a somewhat overfamiliar academic trope, the uncanny nevertheless retains critical purchase on the Gothic imaginary. The work of the Hernandez brothers in the ongoing *Love and Rockets* series has drawn on such diverse elements as science fiction, soap opera, punk rock, and Mexican wrestling to construct an utterly idiosyncratic blend of spectacle and narrative[2]. *Ghost of Hoppers* makes inventive use of the Gothic to examine the relationship of the past to the present and the alienating effects such a disjunction may produce. Less a genre, more an affective modality, Chris Baldick argues that:

> For the Gothic affect to be attained, a tale should combine a fearful sense of inheritance in time with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space, these two dimensions reinforcing one another to produce an impression of sickening descent into disintegration. (Baldick, xix)

Baldick has provided what is perhaps the most economical (if a touch, understandably, hyperbolic) description of the Gothic, one which is relevant here. Let us look again at the extract. The unexpected arrival of a silhouetted figure in the first panel is something of a shock, if not quite a complete non-sequitur, appearing as he does to come from nowhere. The figure signals the narrative intrusion of the uncanny into the "world of common reality." The transition from the first panel to the second is subject-to-subject (McCloud, 70-73), but rather than being straightforward is unsettling.

1 Freud also provided the oneirically Gothic example of a person lost in a forest returning to the same spot over and over again. He goes onto read E.T.A. Hoffmann's *The Sandman* drawing out the uncanny qualities of the story, i.e. that which has been repressed and returns in an altered form, in this case the doubling of the subject in the shape of an automated doll.

2 For a recent and extensive overview of Jaime Hernandez's oeuvre, see Hignite (2010).

The reader is called on to construe closure (in McCloud's sense of the term) and to connect these two panels even as they appear disjointed by way of their positioning, point-of-view and tone. Once such a connection is established, the sensation of dis-ease is, if anything, intensified as it it is apparent that these two figures share the same space. Focalisation is, uneasily, with Maggie, the transitional connection instantaneous; thus we "see" from her perspective, and are then repositioned to read the wordless reaction of her face, uncertainty and unease conveyed minimally and effectively by a single bead of sweat.

The following four panels switch perspective and location very quickly and economically, further enhancing the impression of disorientation. As readers, we are not quite aware of how much narrative time (as opposed to reading time) has passed, only that Maggie is lost. Identification is compromised in these panels, and there is a queasy sense of voyeurism; we watch Maggie from what may be the single or multiple perspectives of concealed antagonists. Focalisation is restored in the sixth panel ("Steady girl"). It has taken just six panels to establish this uncanny sensation. The final two panels of the page shift perspective closer to Maggie as she accidentally cuts her hand on a broken crucifix in her pocket, her wound curiously stigmatic, the pain apparently breaking the uncanny spell.

Hernandez employs a rigid, rectilinear grid for the panel layout; eight panels, two-by-four – a characteristic trait. While this grid may appear inflexible, it works to focus the attention as much as on individual panels as on the page itself as a unit[3]. The manipulation of narrative events within panels is every bit as complex as what goes on between panels.

For Will Eisner, the panel is an important narrative device. In his own work, Eisner frequently dispenses with panel borders altogether going as far as to contend that the "conventional container-frame keeps the reader at bay" (Eisner, 46). This is countered by Hernandez's precise use of repetitive framing panels and their content that arguably draws the reader in or works to deliberately estrange them as a way of conveying the uncanny effect. The page brings together various strands at work in the wider narrative of *Ghost of Hoppers* – it becomes clear that Maggie is "just an old graveyard ghost", out of place wherever she goes, ill at ease with her surroundings and troubled by the events of the past which haunt her in grotesquely altered form. She eventually finds some temporary closure, leaving her ghosts behind for the time being. That, however, is for another time.

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3 Jaime Hernandez: "The frames are basically there to be ignored. It's the stuff going on inside the frame that dictates the pace, setting etc." Interview with Tony Venezia.

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Kamimura's Sublime Rain

by Nicolas Labarre

Kamimura K. (2009) *Lorsque nous vivions ensemble* (Bruxelles: Kana, 51)

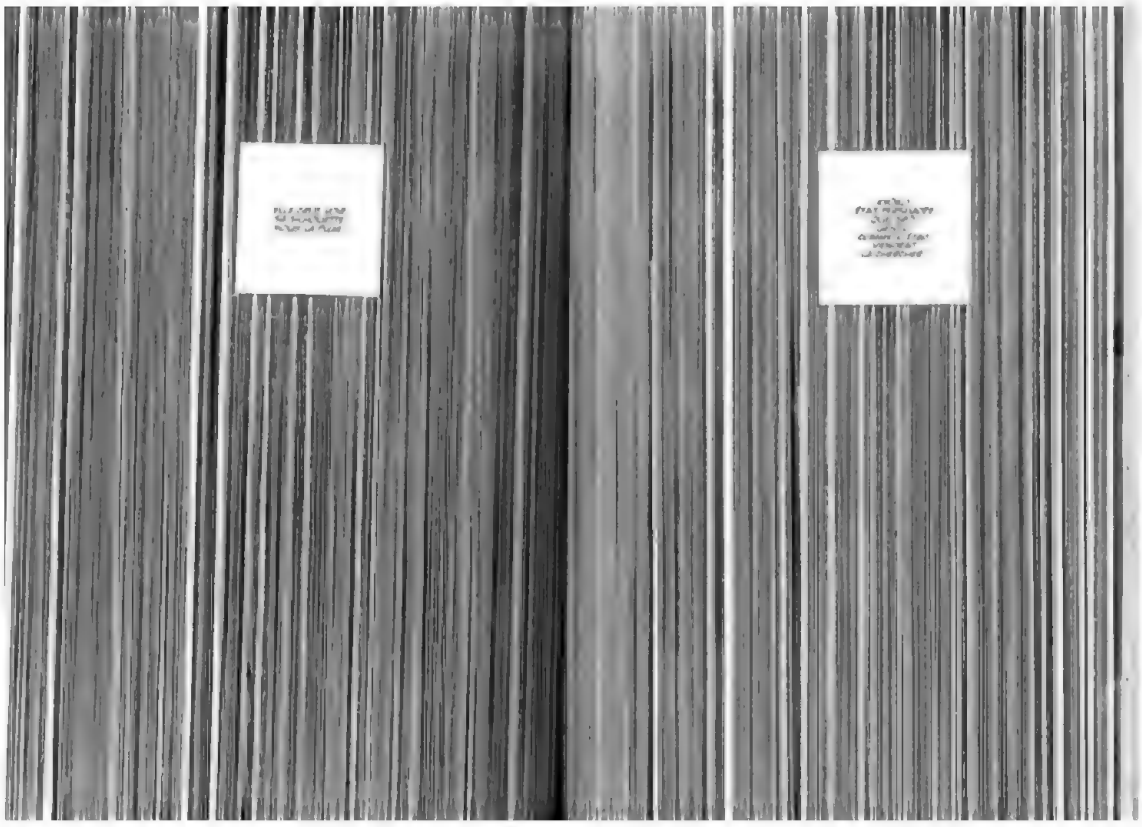
Kazuo Kamimura, who died in 1986, is known primarily in the West for having co-created the ronin series *Lady Snowblood*. However, his *Lorsque nous vivions ensemble* (同棲時代, which could apparently be translated as "Cohabitation period" or "Living together"), published serially between 1972 and 1973, is a very different work, chronicling the love life of a couple of young artists, Kyôko and Jirô, in contemporary Japan. The work is romantic in tone, erotic at times, and often verges on the melodrama as the unmarried couple faces the reprobation of society and their families.

On page 51 of the second French volume, Kyôko is sitting in the psychoanalyst's office after having experienced a serious anxiety attack. She is processing the analyst's claim that she should leave Jirô

or marry him, if she does not want to be "lost for good". While the sexual politics of the passage and the analyst's depiction would make for an interesting analysis, aligned with the general problematic of the melodrama, the graphical treatment of the last pages of the episode is what interests me here.

The two panels on page 51 are very similar, displaying Kamimura's technique of placing characters delineated in thick but supple brush strokes in front overtly geometrical backgrounds. The caption boxes contain Kyôko's internal monologue, and read "Lost"/"I'll be lost". They are vertically aligned and serve to anchor a general vertical downward movement through the page. This downward movement also leads us to comparing the two versions of Kyôko, and the change in her position as she bows her head to cry, also echoes this movement.

The rain seen through the window seems at first designed to block out part of the space within each panel, in order to emphasize Kyôko's isolation. The storm itself is a romantic cliché, conveniently apt to stand either for the psychoanalyst's wrath or for Kyôko's inner landscape. The banality of the symbol and its unappealing graphical representation (while the book contains some stunning landscapes) do draw the attention toward Kyôko's figure. However, the rain is also a part of the general downward vertical movement, as the erratic rain lines of the first panel cohere into an array of vertical lines in the second one.



Kamimura, K. (2009) *Lorsque nous vivions ensemble* (Bruxelles: Kana, 52-3)

After the page break, this verticality is taken to its limit, as the following two pages contain nothing but vertical lines. Although it is entirely abstract, the rain is understood as such because of its inscription within a sequence. However, the image is so dense, so simple and so unfamiliar that it cannot be reduced at once to its narrative function. It creates a visual shock, coinciding with a sudden change in the mode of representation and with a reversal of the graphical hierarchies established in the previous page. Since the rain is aligned with the fold, the very notion of a sequence is cast in doubt, as there is no way for the reader to determine whether the pages contain one or two panels. Kyôko's fear of getting lost is thus realized as even the narrative framework dissolves.

In a way, this is exemplar of what is achieved in *Lorsque nous vivions ensemble*, as Kamimura relies on established symbolism (winter/spring, the animals as metonymy, the sea as a repository of memories) used without irony. The numerous graphical disjunctions call the reader's attention to these symbolic moments, but their treatment is in most cases efficient and striking enough to restore the efficiency of the clichés.

In this case, the disruption of ordinary perception can only be likened to Kant's notion of going beyond beauty to attain the sublime, a notion closely associated with austerity. Kant's words apply both the dryness of the graphical representation in these two pages, but also to the elating shock which they bring about:

> [The feeling of the sublime] is a pleasure that arises only indirectly; viz, it is produced by the feeling of a momentary checking of the vital powers and a consequent stronger overflow of them [...] Hence it is incompatible with charms; and as the mind is not merely attracted by the object but is ever being alternately repelled, the satisfaction in the sublime does not so much involve a positive pleasure as admiration or respect, which rather deserves to be called negative pleasure.
> (Kant, 2007 §23: 61-62)

Indeed, the reading of this passage yields this kind of negative pleasure, as one of the main charms of Kimamura's graphical work, his treatment of the human figure, is temporarily displaced by an abstract yet awe-inspiring rain.

The scene does not end there. Having recovered from the shock, the reader is invited to literally cross the rain, following a horizontal trajectory from the right-hand caption to the left-hand one. "Kyôko was convinced that Jirô, nice as he was, would come to fetch her."/"She thought she glimpsed his figure through the rain." The text thus invites the reader to peer through the abstract verticality in order to catch a glimpse of Jirô as well, but to no avail.

Kamimura, K. (2009) *Lorsque nous vivions ensemble* (Bruxelles: Kana, 54-5)

Only after another page-break are narrativity and denotation reestablished. In these last two pages of the episode, the panel borders are reestablished, and Kyôko is again the graphical focus. The word balloon is located in the top-right corner, where the reading of the page starts, and the reader is thus treated to a series of comforting narrative devices (panel border, balloon, text), which confirm that Kimamura's aim is not to replicate the shock effect. "I don't care if I'm lost, Jirô."

Significantly, the trajectory from the ballon to Kyôko is roughly vertical and the reader's gaze flows down with the rain instead of crossing it horizontally. A sense of reconciliation is thus inscribed in the structure of the page, mirroring once more Kyôko's state of mind.

The very last page, however, qualifies this optimism, as the reader's gaze wanders through the abstract rain, contained within the panel border, yet carrying echoes of the narrative shock of the previous pages.

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Adaptation and Narrative in *Ulysses "Seen"*

by Janine Utell

James Joyce's novel *Ulysses* is considered a touchstone of modernism, published in a watershed year that also saw the appearance of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*. Despite the revolutionary nature of its narrative technique, however, it is possible to situate Joyce's text within a nineteenth-century tradition of what Bill Overton has termed "novels of female adultery" (Overton: 1998), something Joyce is doing explicitly in his story of the cuckolded Leopold Bloom.

In my book *James Joyce and the Revolt of Love: Marriage, Adultery, Desire*, I argue that Joyce is intervening in early twentieth-century debates about marriage by postulating an ethical love (Utell: 2010). Using radical narrative strategies that make demands on both his protagonist and his readers, Joyce asks us to perform a Levinasian recognition of the Other, thus reimagining what it means to be intimate.

I brought my view of Ulysses as a novel about a marriage and intimate life to my work on the Reader's Guide for Robert Berry's comics adaptation of Joyce's book, *Ulysses "Seen"*; my job was to provide accessible, lively, and informed commentary to help first-time readers engage both with the story of Ulysses and with the art of the comic. As author of the Guide for the *"Calypso"* episode–the fourth chapter of the novel which introduces Leopold and Molly Bloom and the difficulties of their marriage–I was able to think in new ways about how Joyce narrativizes intimacy.

To start, I was surprised at how well *Ulysses* lends itself to comics adaptation. A number of Joyce scholars have considered the author's relationship to visual media. Colin MacCabe, for instance, in *Futures for English*, claims that Joyce's work is "unthinkable outside a relation to cinema" (MacCabe:1988:12), given its manipulation of time, space, and voice. Joyce's name appears alongside director Sergei Eisenstein with frequency, especially in connection with the deployment of montage and close-up, and Eisenstein himself theorized Joyce's use of interior monologue, seeing a kinship with his own work (Burkdall: 2001; Werner: 1990; Tall: 1987). The relationship between *Ulysses* and cubism has also been remarked upon (Loss: 1984). But because the conventions of comics allow for representing shifts in perspective, splits in the subject, movement over time and space, and the manipulation of voice–in short, because comics allow for a high degree of narrativity–this form is a good match for Joyce's intensely allusive and elusive text.

More specifically, I found Berry's artistic moves, especially in his engagement with the conventions of romance comics, coupled with his representation of multiple perspectives and voices, to dramatically highlight Joyce's deep concerns with intimacy, empathy, and the question of how we know and love. To illustrate, I've chosen a page from the *"Calypso"* episode (which may be viewed

along with the Reader's Guide here). Some context: this page depicts Bloom returning to his house at 7 Eccles Street after buying a kidney for breakfast. It is still early in the novel, and early in Bloom's day, before he commences his wandering around Dublin in order to avoid being at home while his wife partakes in an adulterous tryst in their marital bed. The Blooms have not had sexual intercourse since the death of their infant son 11 years prior to the action of the novel, which takes place over the course of one day, June 16, 1904.

Berry, R. (2011) *Ulysses "Seen", Calypso*, 28 <http://ulyssesseen.com/landing/2011/06/calypso-0028> Accessed 7 July 2011

To begin, Berry created a visual vocabulary for dealing with what Hugh Kenner calls "Joyce's voices". In the more naturalistic early Bloom chapters of Ulysses, there are usually only two "voices" or focalized narrative perspectives, at work: Bloom's interior monologue and the omniscient narrator. Sometimes we shift from one to the other in mid-paragraph–even mid-sentence–and so two different visual/textual styles are required. The yellow text box is the omniscient narrator, while the thought balloon is Bloom. (Here we do have one speech balloon; this is Molly, calling from off-screen. The "jingle" sound effect represents the quoits of the Blooms' bed, a sound that lingers in Bloom's mind throughout the day as he tries not to imagine his wife in bed with another man.)

This page depicts the moment when Bloom realizes his wife has a lover. The address to Mrs. Marion Bloom violates letterwriting etiquette of the time by erasing Bloom: she should be Mrs.

Leopold Bloom. In addition, the "bold hand", figuratively contrasted with Bloom's hand reaching in from the upper left-hand corner of the middle panel, is both the handwriting of the paramour and the sensual hand that will be on Mrs. Bloom later in the day.

This triptych of panels generates movement and drama resonant of romance comics: the betrayed husband/hero enters his home to see it has already been violated by the presence of another man. But the splitting of the scene via gutters mirrors the splitting of Bloom's subject. The action is drawn out, almost in slow motion, over time and space, while the character himself in that time and space is fragmented. This is echoed by other visual elements on the page. The clear delineation between text box/narrator and thought balloon/Bloom represents the protagonist's separateness from his own experience in moments of sexual anxiety and trauma. Bloom has lost control of the story. His participation, his processing–his narrativizing of his own life–is reduced to fragmentary thoughts that he cannot quite complete.

Furthermore, we do not see Bloom's face. Berry strategically deploys the drawing of the face throughout the episode in ways that speak back to Joyce's own questions about intimacy and knowledge. Bloom's face is obscured, off-screen, or turned away in all three panels. Our access to him is limited, and so is our knowledge of his emotional life, paralleling Bloom's own limited access to intimacy and knowledge of his wife. In Levinasian terms, only through a recognition of the face–the Other–is true intimacy possible, and therefore ethical love and life. It is the work of Ulysses–and Berry's adaptation–to show us how to get there through the complicated negotiation of perspective that reveals and conceals, shares and withholds.

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The English Bugaboo – Cruikshank to Talbot

by James Baker

Talbot, B. (2007) *Alice in Sunderland* (London: Jonathan Cape, p. 295)

Alice in Sunderland, Bryan Talbot's 2007 graphic novel, presents a disconcerting commentary on poverty and xenophobia in modern Britain where immigration is the imagined Other, the bugaboo against which communities define themselves. Talbot gives this bugaboo—'a fancied object of terror; a bogy; a bugbear'[1]—visual form in a conscious authorial reference to John Tenniel's illustration to *"The Jabberwocky"*, the nonsense poem Alice reads in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* (1871).

1 Definition according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*

As both Talbot's bugaboo and Tenniel's Jabberwocky contribute to a lineage of bugaboos traceable to Georgian graphic satire, this essay will examine some aspects of this British diachronic illustrative tradition. In what follows I shall contend that a particular theme which binds together the bugaboos of Talbot, Tenniel and the Georgian satirists is how they speak to the idea of foreign threat[2].

Having stumbled across AiS at The Cartoon Museum, London, I was drawn to how Talbot's bugaboo lovingly captures every dreamlike gothic detail of the Jabberwocky; retaining the verses "jaws that bite [...] claws that catch!", twisted and elongated neck, hide of scales, and three-buttoned waistcoat. Emblazoned across this waistcoat we find 'THE OTHER', yet Talbot's bugaboo is not a universal Other rather one constructed by political parties on the extreme right who, we read, 'ruthlessly take advantage of ordinary people's natural anxiety, cranked up to fever pitch by the tabloids, to spread blatant lies and gross exaggeration, appealing to the lowest human instinct...intolerance of The Other'.

For a scholar of Georgian communication (like me), such management of popular consciousness recalls the pamphlet war surrounding Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791), and the censorship trials brought by the government against William Hone in 1817. Moreover it recalls Linda Colley's seminal *Britons* (1992), which posited that from the eighteenth century onwards external threat and extra-national referents constructed the British national character. Three manifestations of this statement emerge from page 295 of *AiS* and provide potential tools for studying the diachronic bugaboo. First, those who construct Others/bugaboos by legitimising prejudice can also be themselves considered as Others/bugaboos (see panel 2).

Cruikshank, I., *"The French Bugaboo Frightening the Royal Commanders"* (14 April 1797, S W Fores) BM 9005 271 x 499 © The Trustees of the British Museum

2 This is not to say that the 1790s single sheet graphic satire performed the same social function as the late-twentieth century graphic novel. For although the two may display outward similarities and share the same representational chronology, the technological processess of production and the audiences they reached vastly differ. As scholars we await a thorough analysis of the relationship between technology, business exigencies, and consumption with respect to graphic satire across the last three centuries, and in its absence we must confine our diachronic analyses to representation.

These themes are certainly observable in Georgian bugaboos. Reading back from Talbot and Tenniel we may expect the bugaboo in Cruikshank's *The French Bugaboo Frightening the Royal Commanders* to be the roaring and scaled beast dominating the design. However for Cruikshank the national bugaboo is 'BUONAPARTE', the archetypal bonnet-rouge revolutionary – emaciated (see the ridiculous girth of his boots), ragged, and manic. Napoleon reaches beyond the ordinary by taming a rampaging steed overcoming European Christianity and symbols of monarchy whilst exhaling an army of soldiers, canons, and demons. "Vive la liberté" these fog shrouded apparitions cry, driving away in terror the hapless Archduke Charles and Duke of York[3].

For Richard Newton, threat and foreignness are found in George III, the monstrous and reactionary steed whose wide, bulging eyes provide a visual foci. By the 1790s the King had largely shaken off anti-Hanoverian ire, but his proclamation of 21 May 1792 against seditious writings drafted by his Prime Minister (and here rider) William Pitt the Younger, bestowed back to George his hereditary un-English aura in the eyes of many radical commentators[4].

The bugaboo is then a powerful diachronic satiric device, articulating grand narratives of fear, xenophobia and Otherness. Yet I suspect the more inquisitive reader will find this reading too blunt and too simplistic. You may ask what of the cowardly (and uncaricatured) commanders fleeing in Cruikshank's design? How does the ridiculous sartorial and biological jumble that is Tenniel's bugaboo reflect the nonsense of its literary source? And to what extent does Talbot ask his reader to marginalise those who construct bugaboos? Such ambiguities surround most bugaboos, and can be fruitfully analysed by deploying theoretical, philosophical, and social scientific discussions of difference. This literature is extensive and diffuse, yet the classic remarks remain those found in David Hume's formidable *A Treatise of Human Nature*:

> A fourth unphilosophical species of probability is that deriv'd from general rules, which are the source of what we properly call PREJUDICE. An Irishman cannot have wit, and a Frenchman cannot have solidarity; for which reason, though the conversation of the former in any instance be visibly agreeable, and of the latter very judicious, we have entertained such a prejudice against them, that they must be dunces or fops in spite of sense and reason. Human nature is very subject to envy of this kind; and perhaps this nation as much as any other.
> (Hume, p. 4)

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3 The former being the Austrian Commander who was defeated by Napoleon during the Italian campaign of 1796-7; the latter had been commander of the British Army since 1795, and due to his inexperience (and suspected incompetence) was widely expected by satirists to be defeated by Napoleon.

4 see Richard Newton, *A BUGABOO!!!* (2 June 1792, William Holland).

This 'prejudice' (Hume, Book 1, Part III, Sect XIII, pp. 146-7) constructs counter-experiential 'stereotypes' (coined in Walter Lippmann's 1922 classic *Public Opinion*)[5], as a willing social fabric powerfully fixates abstract types within their arts for use as referents to define individuals or groups encountered in lived experience (so the miser is 'Jewish' and the fop is 'Frenchified')[6]. What this foregrounds is the ignorance inherent within stereotyping, demanding that we, like Talbot, turn our attentions upon those constructing anti-types, for what *Alice in Sunderland* makes explicit is the ambiguity central to the bugaboo – that it is constructed by another bugaboo.

Dent, W. *"The National Assembly or meeting of the three Estates"* (22 January 1790) BM7623 253 x 423" © The Trustees of the British Museum

Second, jealousy has agency in capitulating prejudice and stereotyping into public acceptance (see panels 7-8). For example, jealous of Scots startling success as inventors, thinkers, medical innovators and empire builders, Dent in his 1790 *THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OR MEETING OF THE THREE ESTATES* places a Scotch 'Secret Beast' behind the English throne, referencing fears of a disproportionate and furtive highland influence suffocating Englishness[7].

Third, the xenophobia which constructs bugaboos (Talbot's 'intolerance of the Other') is a marketable commodity. This is evident in panel 3 of *AiS* where the DAILY BILGE attracts readers with willingly false and implicitly racist headlines such as 'ASYLUM SEEKERS SWAMP BRITAIN!'. Interestingly scholarly orthodoxy maintains that xenophobia was equally marketable to audiences

5 Meaning in this context 'to prepossess with unexamined opinions', see Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755).

6 see Lippmann W. (1922) *A Public Opinion* (76-100).

7 See Echeruo (1978) and Felsenstein (1995).

of Georgian graphic satire[8]. But what differs between tabloids and graphic satire is that whilst the bugaboos in the latter are satiric and consciously ambiguous, those in the former are only ambiguous when read from a vantage point outside of their (potential/likely) audience. Talbot's bugaboo then forces us to reconsider the audience of past mediums which invoked the bugaboo, and to consider potential duality in the bugaboo's marketability – as at one and the same time xenophobic and comically ambiguous.

This essay has shown that the bugaboo in English graphic satire speaks to discourses of foreign threat by pointing to the manifest ambiguity within such discourses – namely that those making threatening bugaboos are themselves threatening bugaboos. As these bugaboos have formed part of the 'cartoonists armoury' (as Ernst Gombrich famously called it) of the British illustrative tradition for over two and a half centuries, it behoves us then to explore when and where the bugaboo problematises orthodoxies regarding English society, culture, and communication.

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Ranma ½: Gender and Genre Shifting in Manga

by Michael Hill

> *In the 1960s, when Japan's economic growth was in full swing, novelist and occasional singer Akiyuki Nosaka sang, "Between man and woman there is a deep, dark river..." The "river" he referred to was indeed wide then, and the youth of that generation spent much of their adolescence trying to figure out ways to cross it. In the three decades since, the rigid divisions between men and women in Japan have begun to shift and to settle into new configurations* (Takada 1994: 195).

The manga *Ranma ½* by Rumiko Takahashi provides an interesting case-study with which to track these shifts and configurations not only in terms of sexual relationships but also in genre/gender development. In this series the teenage boy Ranma Saotome is betrothed to the teenage girl Akane Tendo by mutual arrangement of their fathers but without the consent of the two teenagers. The trouble is Akane is a Tom-boy who hates boys and Ranma is a boy, except when he turns into a girl, thus the 'half' appendage of his name in the title. He is half a boy and half a girl but not at the same time. It is not so much a case of cross-gender but of alternating gender (see colour cover image above). The catalyst for his transformation is water, here employed with both mythological and emotional/metaphorical significance. Whenever he gets wet he becomes a girl and stays that way until hot water (preferably not boiling) is poured on his head at which time he reverts to his male form. His father has a similar yet stranger affliction.

It brings to mind the deliberations that Roland Barthes derived from his analysis of Japanese culture and philosophy:

> We know that Buddhism baffles the fatal course of any assertion (or of any negation) by recommending that one never be caught up in the four following propositions: *this is A–this is not A–this is both A and not-A–this is neither A nor not-A* (Barthes 1989: 73)

Ranma is Ranma. When he is not Ranma he is "the pigtailed goddess". Ranma is both Ranma and the goddess. Ranma is neither Ranma nor the goddess. Akane's sister Nabiki attempts to explain this alternation with the line "See...that girl there...Her body. Her soul. All his." (Takahashi 1993: 135, 5-6).

Takahashi, R. (1993) *Ranma ½* Vol. 1 (San Francisco: Viz Media, 72, 1-2)

In his seminal study of Japanese comics Frederik L. Schodt cited the warrior spirit and theme as a vital genre and its sub-generic sprawl and development from samurai manga through *yakuza* stories to the "...school-gang comic, which depicts the juvenile delinquent element of Japanese schools and is popular among student readers" (Schodt 1983: 76). Much of the content of *Ranma ½* takes place at Furinkan High School that Ranma, Akane Nabiki attend. Every morning Akane has to run the gauntlet of the many male suitors who desire her and wish to make theirs and whom she must fight to reach her classroom (see b&w image above).

This does not phase either of the characters as Akane's father runs a karate school, *Tendo's Martial Arts/School of Indiscriminate Grappling*, where Akane is a top pupil. Ranma is also highly proficient in martial arts. Fight scenes are so frequent that the school could be mistaken for a teenage fight club. Once word gets out that Akane is taken and that Ranma is her fiancé he attracts the aggression of a few smitten disappointed rivals who are also excellent fighters. Some of his fight scenes with them have sexual elelments as, for example, he inevitably gets wet and to his assailant's surprise changes gender. Then when grabbing Ranma in a hold from behind his rival suddenly feels a pair of girl's breasts in his hands.

A different genre to the school-gang type is *shojo* or girls comics. Fusami Ogi traced the change in profile of this genre that previously had no sexual content, once it incorporated male characters and sexual themes:

Shoujo (girls) manga (Japanese comics) was at first a gender-specific category that assumed a female world for both readers and authors. Once *shoujo manga* began to incorporate male homosexuality as a subject in the 1970s, however, this female world was subverted in several ways. When male characters made their appearance, they introduced a new vision of sexuality by giving *shoujo* a vantage point through which to explore female desires without overtly acknowledging them. (Ogi 2001: 151)

Takahashi, R. (1988) *Ranma ½* Vol. 1 (Tokyo: Shogakukan Inc, 30-31)

I THINK YOU SHOULD KNOW...
...THAT WHEN HE BATTLES A MALE OPPONENT...
...UPPERCLASSMAN KUNO IS VERY SKILLED!
AND I THINK YOU SHOULD KNOW...
BOOT!
...THAT BLUE PANTIES REALLY DON'T SUIT YOU.
GO BACK AND DIE!

Takahashi, R. (1993) *Ranma ½* Vol. 1 (San Francisco: Viz Media,143, 3-6)

Further fracturing of the *shojo manga* genre occurred when a new sub-genre, *"ladies comics"* or *josei*, followed in the 1980s and another, *"boy's love"* or *yaoi*, in the 1990s. Sex is a theme in *Ranma ½* and often a source of awkward embarrassment for the characters as in Ranma and Akane's nude meeting in the bathroom, and his unexpected view of her underwear (see b&w images above and below).

In *Ranma ½* it is not just the gender that gets confused but also the genre. Writer and artist

Rumiko Takahashi, a woman, was not meant to write manga that appealed to boys but she succeeded as Paul Gravett described:

> "Women have now also broken into the boys' and men's magazines, formerly the preserve of male mangaka. By confounding and confusing sexual stereotypes, the love comedies Rumiko Takahashi produced for boys' (shonen) weeklies in the 1980s came to fascinate readers of both sexes" (Gravett 2004: 81).

Takahashi, a female mangaka published in a boys weekly, took the romantic genre aimed at female readers, added dollops of sex, fight action and of course comedy to form a sexy/romantic/comedy/fight hybrid subgenre that became popular with readers of both genders.

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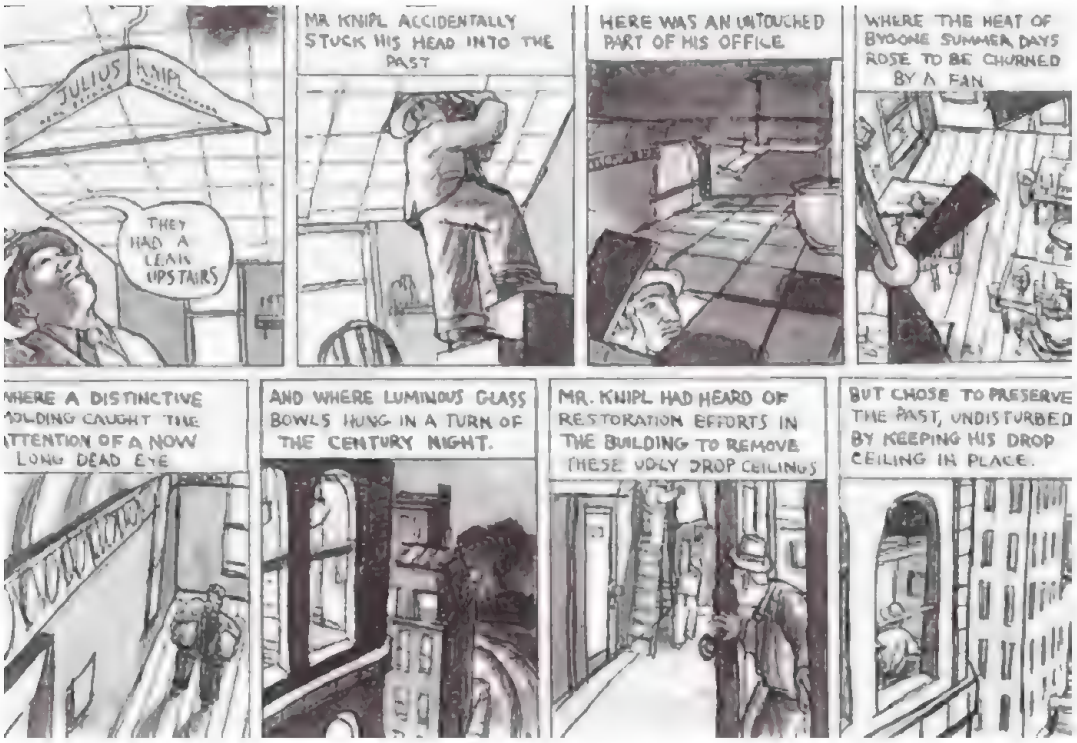
A Note on Ben Katchor's Temporal Palimpsests

by Kathleen Dunley

The term palimpsest is loaded with conflicted notions. The word refers to ancient manuscripts where the old text was scraped away to make room for new text. Despite the act of the erasure, the old text is still visible, even many years after its erasure. Disappearance on one hand, and reuse on the other, the notion of conflict is inherent in the very nature of the palimpsest.

Marc Augé noted this trait in his comparison of "never fully erased" places and "never fully completed" nonplaces (Augé, 2000: 79). Andreas Huyssen noted conflict in his study of the built environment, using the World Trade Center site in New York as an example of an erased building that still marks the landscape (Huyssen, 2003: 6-7).

In comics, the palimpsest can appear in studies of contrast. A strip from Ben Katchor's *Cheap Novelties* stands out for its portrayal of the spatial palimpsest as he shows the impacts of the past on the landscape of the present.


JULIUS KNIPL
THEY HAD A LEAK UPSTAIRS
MR KNIPL ACCIDENTALLY STUCK HIS HEAD INTO THE PAST
HERE WAS AN UNTOUCHED PART OF HIS OFFICE
WHERE THE HEAT OF BYGONE SUMMER DAYS ROSE TO BE CHURNED BY A FAN
WHERE A DISTINCTIVE MOLDING CAUGHT THE ATTENTION OF A NOW LONG DEAD EYE
AND WHERE LUMINOUS GLASS BOWLS HUNG IN A TURN OF THE CENTURY NIGHT.
MR. KNIPL HAD HEARD OF RESTORATION EFFORTS IN THE BUILDING TO REMOVE THESE UGLY DROP CEILINGS
BUT CHOSE TO PRESERVE THE PAST, UNDISTURBED BY KEEPING HIS DROP CEILING IN PLACE.

Katchor, B. (2006: 142) "Excerpts from Cheap Novelties" *Graphic Fiction, Cartoons, and True Stories*, Ed. Ivan Brunetti. (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 142, 1-8)

In this sample, a leak in Julius Knipl's roof propels him to look past the dropped ceiling installed in his office. There, he finds "an untouched part" of the office, consisting of old ceiling fans, "distinctive mouldings," and glass light fixtures, all intact and all frozen in time.

Visually, the scene is compelling as the objects are focused on in their historical context. Instead of zooming in on the objects in their individual stasis, Katchor brings them to life. The ceiling fan turns on a hot day, a "long dead eye" gazes at the moulding, and the old lights illuminate a "turn of the century night." These artifacts embody the palimpsest. They have been "erased" by the new dropped ceilings, but persist. Further, judging by the narrative, they come to life for the viewer. We learn, towards the end of the strip, that the ceilings are on their way out, part of a restoration movement. In the end, however, Knipl decides to keep history under wraps, choosing "to preserve the past, undisturbed, by keeping his dropped ceiling in place."

The ardent preservationist might take issue with this decision. If the artifacts contained above the ceiling have such meaning, why keep them hidden. The notion of the palimpsest may come into play to provide a provisional answer. The dropped ceilings were installed for the sake of utility, erasing the "text" of the past while simultaneously preserving it.

Removing the dropped ceilings might make the past visible, but to what ends? Opening up the artifacts of the past makes them volatile to change again. The trends of the future might dictate removing the old fixtures, either to conform to new styles, energy efficiency standards, and a host of other elements left to the reader's imagination.

If space is seen as a palimpsest, it means it is in flux... at least until it is erased completely (my next post will tackle this outcome). In Knipl's eyes, then, true preservation involves stasis to a point. It is notable that the last panel shows the exterior of his office with the hidden treasures just slightly visible through his office window.

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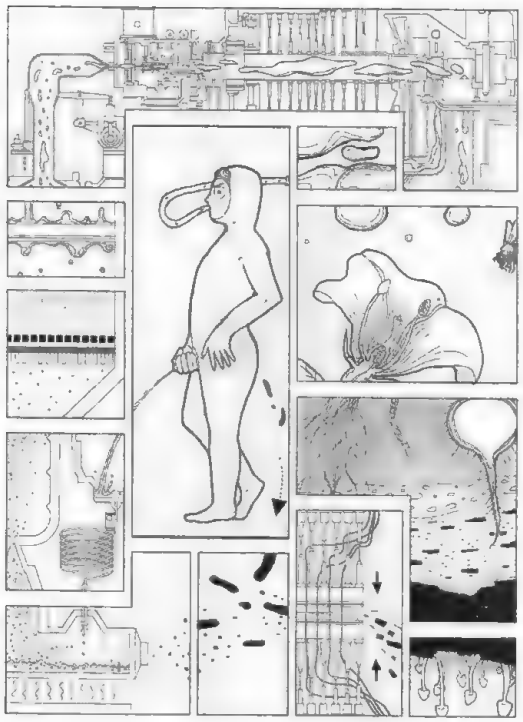
Architecture and comics: *Citizens of No Place*

by Roberto Bartual



Lai, J. (2012) *Citizens of No Place* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press) (no pagination)

The tension between sequentiality and tabularity has always been characteristic of comics. On the one hand, the comics grid usually imposes a linear reading path (left to right in the West; right to left in the East) establishing a strict chronological sequence for the events in the page. On the other hand, some unusual grid patterns may also invite the reader to go astray from the traditional path and follow the panels in a non-linear sequence, giving precedence to spatial relations between panels instead of temporal relations[1].

Chris Ware's diagrammatic compositions, Art Spiegelman's *In The Shadow of No Towers* (Spiegelman: 2004), or Francisco Ibáñez's *13 Rue del Percebe* (Ibáñez: 2001) are good examples of

1 "Tabularity" is a property of the comic page that was first defined by Pierre Fresnault-Derruelle: "the pages are tabular systems where the panels are no longer integrated within a logic system; in certain comics that represent the mental state of the hero, they (the panels) sometimes express complex relations of contiguity" (Fresnault-Derruelle, 1976: 23).

this latter tabular tendency[2]. But there are many other authors and titles we could add to the list: one of them is Jimenez Lai and his latest work, *Citizens of No Place*.

What amuses me most of Lai's tabular approach to comics (as well as Ware's, Spiegelman's and Ibáñez's) is its relation with architecture, which may not be evident at a first look to the page reproduced above. *Citizens of No Place* works as an essay on comics and architecture, both in form of strips and written essays interspersed through the book. The page I selected is placed at the very beginning of *Citizens of No Place*, before the contents and acknowledgements sections, without any text explaining its function in the context of the book. But once we are aware of Lai's conception of comics, its meaning will become clear.

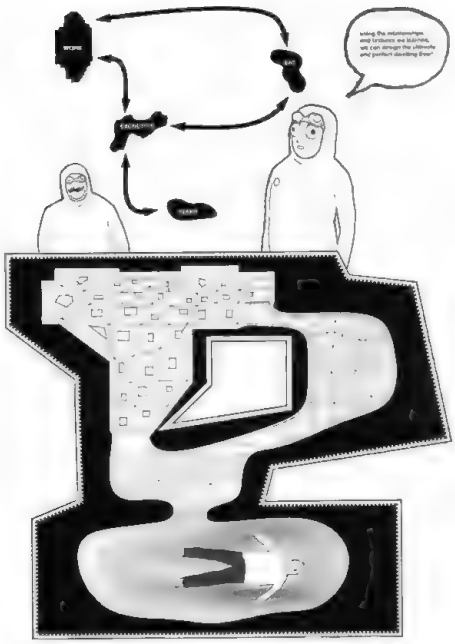
The resemblances between a house plan and a comics grid are more than superficial. Of course they are conceived to represent very different concepts: a plan is a device of space-representation and a comics grid is used to represent time. However, they also represent relations between objects, panels in the case of the comics grid, rooms in the case of a house plan, and when you represent relations, even if they are spatial, in a certain way you are always representing time-routines. A house plan is not a comic because it can't be read in sequence, we could argue. But are we totally sure we can't give a sequential reading to a house plan? On the contrary: partial chronologies can be read in any plan. Seeing a kitchen next to a dining room in a house plan tells us the story of the countless times we have been cooking dinner, brought the food to our guests in the living room, put the food on the table, and went back to the kitchen to bring the desserts. The same happens with a toilet next to the bedroom. The position of the rooms in the plan (and in the real house) is adapted to the chronologic sequence of events in our daily life.

The same happens in the picture above. Adjacent panels are not only the expression of adjacent spaces, as in a tabular page, but also of adjacent actions and cause-effect relations. What we see is a very particular map of daily life routine; it's a map of our basic everyday functions. A man is being fed by means of a machine that provides him with the necessary nutrients, which are probably extracted from the soil by the same machine; then, the man's urine is processed by the same machine and expelled though a hose, in order to mix it with solid faeces and obtain manure for the food to grow again.

There are four routines represented here: eating, urinating, excreting and recycling. They could have been represented in a linear way, like I did when I wrote the four words one after another; but instead of that, the panels are set on the page like in a house plan. Eating, urinating and excreting are not placed in line, as language would suggest, but in a triangle, reinforcing the idea of circularity and repetition. Like a kitchen, a dining room or a toilet, each panel stands for a basic human routine,

2 *The Comics Grid* has published several articles on the different uses of tabularity in comics: Greice Schneider's analysis of *David Boring*, Esther Claudio's take on *In the Shadow of No Towers*, or Nicolas Labarre's minute reconstruction of the visual relations among panels in a page from *The Authority*.

connected among them in such a manner that it expresses a certain conception of life: an endless cycle of bodily functions. Lai goes as far as suggesting, in quite a sarcastic manner, that a sketch of such a cycle could be used to draft a plan of "the ultimate and perfect dwelling ever".



Lai, J. (2012) *Citizens of No Place* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press) (no pagination)

It is a bleak conception of human life the one contained in the pages of *Citizens of No Place*, but Jimenez Lai is trying to remind us that maps (either the comics grid or a house plan) are not neutral or objective representations of places and facts; they are an expression of human needs, and if what they express seems mechanical and repetitive it's only because our lives have become mechanical and repetitive. But it also works the other way round. The maps and structures we build to live inside also influence our routines (and our soul), so the first step to change routines and souls is to make other plans.

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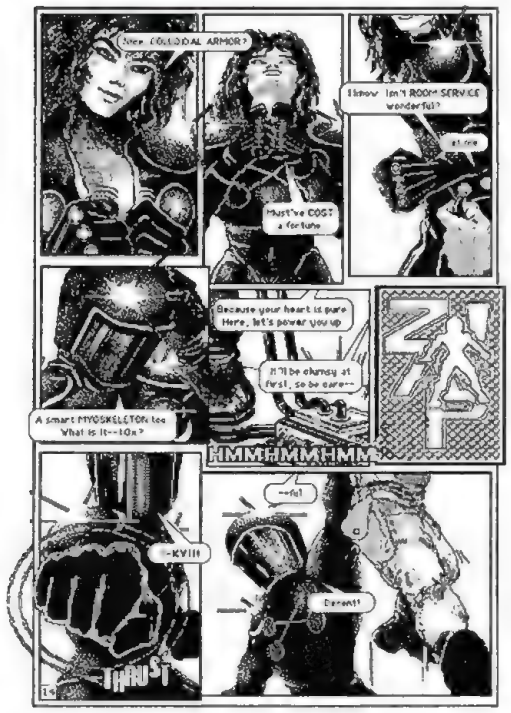
Un-holy Alliance: *Shatter* and the Aesthetics of Cyberpunk

by Ernesto Priego

Pencil on paper by Charlie Athanas for *Shatter* (1986)



Page from *Shatter* by Charlie Athanas, redrawn "from scratch (no scanners) on the MacPlus" (1986)

It is thought the first printed comic book to make complete use of digital illustration was *Shatter*, originally by Peter Gillis (writer) and Mike Saenz (illustrator). Edited by Mike Gold and art directed by Alex Wald, *Shatter* appeared in March 1985 as a double-page spread in the British computer magazine *Big K*, becoming a 14-issue comic book series published by First Comics Publishing (Chicago) from 1985 to 1987 (original writer Peter Gillis left after the second issue; digital artist Charlie Athanas took over the title from issue 9)[1].

The comic was completely drawn on a first-generation Apple Macintosh computer, using a mouse and printed on a dot-matrix printer[2]. The printouts were photographed in the same way a black and white original would, and the colour separations were applied later in the traditional way (McCloud 2000: 140; 165; Szadkowski 2000). On his blog, Athanas recalled how:

> The artwork was created from the ground up on a MacPlus with 1MB of RAM and a couple of 3.4 floppy drives [...] the pages were created in black and white, printed and then colored in the traditional manner. It was not until the last couple of issues that I was able to get a stylus and tablet. Prior to that, it was 28 pages of artwork, every two months, using a mouse to draw with[3].

Athanas would also "breakdown the layout in pencil to get approval from the editors and so the writer could move on with the script." After the panel layout drawn on paper was approved, he "would then redraw these images from scratch (no scanners) on the MacPlus and put in the dialog when it arrived" (Athanas 2004).

The MacPlus (1986), Athanas' main drawing tool

1 Mike Saenz created *Iron Man: Crash*, for Marvel comics in 1988. It has been credited as the first "digital graphic novel" (McCloud 2000; Szadkowski 2000).

2 Athanas worked with a Macintosh Plus, which was introduced on 16 January 1986. It was the third model in the Apple Macintosh line. Unlike its predecessor, de 512K, the MacPlus came with 1 MB of RAM expandable to 4 MB and an external SCSI peripheral bus.

3 Athanas' blog is now at <http://burningcityinc.blogspot.com/> but unfortunately the original post has been removed and is no longer available. Szadkowski (2000) cites the same passage. See Athanas 2004.

Athanas also describes the problems he faced negotiating the parameters of print with the capabilities of his MacPlus and the software he used (FullPaint):

> The hardest part was not drawing with the big clunky mouse that came with the MacPlus. Nor was it the complete lack of memory, which meant that you had the drawing program (FullPaint) on a floppy in the main drive slot, your 800K work disk floppy in the external drive, and you had to swap out disks to use any stock art that you had created. No, the hard part was the fact that you could only see about two thirds of a full page at any one time, unless you shrunk it to a postage stamp size thumbnail. Covers and splash pages, especially double-page splash pages, were a layout nightmare (Athanas 2004).

FullPaint was a software for the creation of computer graphics developed by Ann Arbor Softworks. As an alternative to MacPaint, it allowed to resize the windows and to scroll within the document instead of dragging with the "Hand Tool." FullPaint did not allow true grey scale; a similar effect was achieved through "dithering", which along the dot matrix printing gave *Shatter* its particular "cyberpunk" feel.

Athanas is clear that the struggle was not a technical or computational one. The problem was to use the technology of the time to the standards of printed comic books. In the introduction to Pepe Moreno's *Batman: Digital Justice* (1990), Athanas' former editor Mike Gold remembers:

> At that time, I was the editor of a Midwest comic book company when a couple of old friends, Peter Gillis and Mike Saenz, showed me rough printouts of a story that was produced on a 128K Apple Macintosh computer, using but one disk drive. The artwork was chunky and brittle: it looked like some amphetamine addict had been given a box of a zip-a-tone that suffered from a glandular disease. But the look was totally unique to comics. Within several months, we refined the look and the resulting effort – *SHATTER* – was one of the best-selling comics of the year. It completely astonished the folks over at Apple Computer, Inc., who never perceived such a use for their hardware (1990:2).

By 1988-1990 these technologies were quite advanced, and Athanas, Gillis and Saenz were working at the edge of what was technologically possible and finding new uses for tools that were not originally intended for that purpose. In terms of theme and aesthetics, Shatter was groundbreaking but in retrospect the artwork is unavoidably a sign of its times. Like many other comics being published

at the time in America, the UK and Europe, it shared and continued the influence of cyberpunk aesthetics, as made famous by William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, published in 1984.

As seen on the second image above, the dot-matrix style of *Shatter* made no attempt to hide the technical limitations of the computer; on the contrary, what Saenz and the artists that followed him wanted to do was to emphasize as much as possible the computerised nature of the creative process. The style echoed Gibson's definition of "cyberspace" in *Neuromancer*:

> A graphical representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the non-space of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding... (Gibson 2004:69).

Bruce Sterling would coin the term "cyberpunk" in 1986 in his preface to the short story anthology *Mirrorshades* (1986), and what he wrote about that generation of science fiction writers could equally be applied to comic book artists, writers, editors and publishers such as the contributors of adult fantasy and sci-fi comics magazines *Heavy Metal* and *Métal Hurlant*, particularly Richard Corben, and the *Shatter* team:

> Like punk music, cyberpunk is in some sense a return to roots. The cyberpunks are perhaps the first SF generation to grow up not only within the literary tradition of science fiction but in a truly science-fictional world. For them, the techniques of classical "hard SF" extrapolation, technological literacy – are not just literary tools but an aid to daily life [...] And suddenly a new alliance is becoming evident: an integration of technology and the Eighties counterculture. An un-holy alliance of the technical world and the world of organized dissent –the underground world of pop culture, visionary fluidity, and street-level anarchy (Sterling 1986).

This "un-holy alliance" was obvious in the realm of comic book textuality: having inherited the tradition of underground dissent of the late 1960s and 1970s work by Crumb, Shelton, Kurtzman etc., the sci-fi and superhero comics became a fertile breeding ground for a literary and aesthetic trend that had technology and counterculture at its core.

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NB: Scott Bukatman has written on comics and cyberpunk; his *Matters of Gravity: Special Effects and Supermen in the 20th Century* (Duke University Press, 2003) is an important resource.

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A Map of *Hicksville*

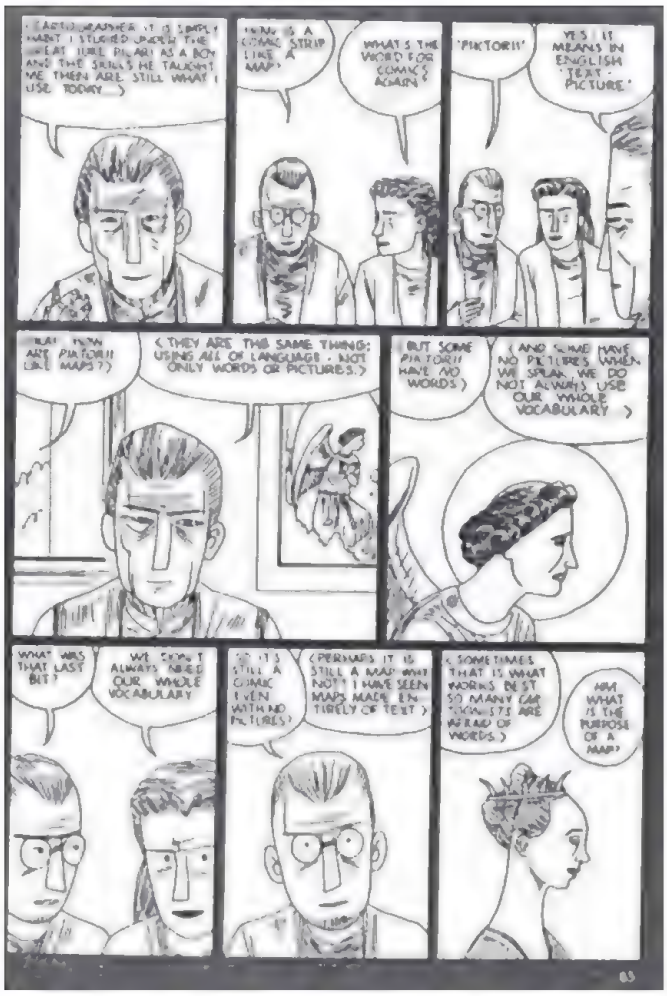
by Jason Dittmer

Dylan Horrocks' *Hicksville* (2010 [1998]) is described in a review quoted on the back cover as 'a sweetly told love letter to the comics medium.' This is certainly true; the comic is immersed in the history of the medium, rich in intertextuality and comics lore. However, the comic is just as much about space and displacement as it is about comics.

The plot revolves around a journalist for *Comics World* who goes to a small town on the north coast of New Zealand to explore the back story of Dick Burger, the most famous comics writer/artist/producer of all time. He discovers in Hicksville a kind of bizarro-world, in which comics are the most-esteemed form of popular culture and everyone lives and breathes them the way the rest of the world idolizes Hollywood. The town even holds a library of the comics that should have been made, but were not (at least not in 'our' continuity): comics made by Pablo Picasso and Gertrude Stein, as well as magna opera by well-known actual comics authors.

It is not surprising that this comics utopia is located in the most isolated place on earth. Its displacement from the 'real world' reflects the distance between the world as it is and the world as *Hicksville* would have it. Indeed, the term utopia in Greek is ambiguous in its translation – it can mean either 'good place' or 'no place', inserting displacement into the very structure of the word. Whatever utopia might be, it is definitively somewhere other than, and better than, 'here'.

Hicksville also considers the role of spatiality in storytelling, but goes beyond the usual arguments about the fragmentation of space inherent to the medium of comics. Rather, in a two page sequence, Horrocks considers all forms of language and storytelling as maps. The scene is an interview by two Hickvilleans of Emil Kópen, the famed cartoonist and national treasure of the mythical Eastern European country of Cornucopia (the designation of this imagined country, which values comics enough to consider Kópen a treasure, as the 'Horn of Plenty' is itself another displacement of utopia). Initially the conversation revolves around the classic question of whether comics are primarily visual or textual (Varnum and Gibbons 2001).


(AND WHEREAS IT IS SIMPLY HARD I STUCK BACK TO THE GREAT TURTLE PILLARI AS A BOY AND THE SKILLS HE TAUGHT ME THEN ARE STILL WHAT I USE TODAY...)
HOW IS A COMIC STRIP LIKE A MAP?
WHAT'S THE WORD FOR COMICS AGAIN?
'PIKTORII'
YES! IT MEANS IN ENGLISH 'TEXT-PICTURE.'
(THEY ARE THE SAME THING: USING ALL OF LANGUAGE - NOT ONLY WORDS OR PICTURES.)
(BUT SOME PIKTORII HAVE NO WORDS)
(AND COMICS HAVE NO PICTURES WHEN WE SPEAK. WE DO NOT ALWAYS USE OUR WHOLE VOCABULARY.)
WHAT WAS THAT LAST BIT?
WE DON'T ALWAYS NEED OUR WHOLE VOCABULARY
(IT'S STILL A COMIC EVEN WITH NO PICTURES)
(PERHAPS IT IS STILL A MAP! WHY NOT? I HAVE SEEN MAPS MADE ENTIRELY OF TEXT.)
(SOMETIMES THAT IS WHAT WORKS BEST SO MANY CARTOGRAPHERS ARE AFRAID OF WORDS.)
HM. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A MAP?

Horrocks, D. (2010) *Hicksville* (Montréal: Drawn and Quarterly, 85)

But the conversation cuts right through this debate like Alexander through the Gordian knot – Kópen imagines sequential images, texts, or any form of narrative as maps, even referring to himself as a cartographer. Kópen says that all narratives are maps because they are ultimately about the spatial relationships among bodies. This is illustrated through a shift in perspective: in the first page Kópen is viewed head-on, including a picture of a classical angel figure in the background, which becomes the focal point of a whole panel as the conversation unfolds. Mysteriously the face of the angel morphs into a medieval princess; the turn of the page explains this shift via a perspectival change, in which Kópen is viewed from the side, revealing a new background for the otherwise static scene. The sequence foregrounds the necessary interpretive skill inherent to reading comics: the understanding of bodies' orientation in space.

(MAPS ARE OF TWO KINDS. SOME SEEK TO REPRESENT THE LOCATION OF THINGS IN SPACE. THAT IS THE FIRST KIND - THE GEOGRAPHY OF SPACE. BUT OTHERS REPRESENT THE LOCATION OF THINGS IN TIME - OR PERHAPS THEIR PROGRESSION THROUGH TIME. THESE MAPS TELL STORIES. WHICH IS TO SAY THEY ARE THE GEOGRAPHY OF TIME.)
(AND YOU MAKE THE SECOND KIND.)
...na
Jim
(IN A SENSE YES. BUT THESE DAYS I HAVE BEGUN TO FEEL THAT STORIES TOO ARE BASICALLY CONCERNED WITH SPATIAL RELATIONSHIPS. THE PROXIMITY OF BODIES. TIME IS SIMPLY WHAT INTERFERES WITH THAT. YES?)
Vuk
Ilo
("THE PROXIMITY OF BODIES?")
(YOU ARE HERE NEAR ME, LIKE A BRIGHT FLAME. THAT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN WHY OR FROM YOU ARE HERE. AND YOUR FRIEND ALSO - FOR ALL I KNOW YOU MAY BE LOVERS. OR ELSE YOU HAVE A LOVER BACK IN YOUR OWN COUNTRY OR IN CRETE.)
(THE THINGS WE CREATE ARE EITHER NEAR US OR FAR. WHEREAS TIME IS ABOUT DISTANCE. I HAVE LIVED MANY YEARS AND I HAVE LEARNED NOT TO TRUST PROCESS. CREATION DESTRUCTION. THESE ARE NOT THE REAL STORY. WHEN WE DWELL ON SUCH THINGS WE INEVITABLY LAPSE INTO CLICHE. THE TRUE DRAMA IS IN THESE RELATIONSHIPS OF SPACE.)
NJim
Klav
(BUT A FLAME EATEN A TOUCH. THESE ARE PROCESSES NOT THINGS.)
(BUT BEHIND SUCH PROCESSES THERE IS A STILLNESS. AND IN THAT QUIET I SEE SPATIAL RELATIONSHIPS WHICH TRANSCEND TIME.)

Horrocks, D. (2010) *Hicksville* (Montréal: Drawn and Quarterly, 86)

This new background carries the burden of expressing Kópen's argument regarding the centrality of embodied spatiality to narrative. The medieval princess is shown to be one of a string of comics images portraying sensuality, connection, and the juxtaposition of bodies.

On this page, Kópen explains that there are two kinds of maps: those that portray spatial location, and those that locate things in time. These are expressions of two ways of considering space within comics, here shorthanded as Einsteinian and Bergsonian. Albert Einstein and Henri Bergson famously debated the nature of time, with Einstein arguing that space and time were interchangeable (as emphasized in his concept of time-space), and Bergson seeing them as independent and only ascribed a relationship after an event had occurred (Guerlac 2006).

Einstein was widely regarded as winning that debate, but recently philosophers have returned to the Bergsonian perspective to mine it for insight. For comics, the Einsteinian notion of time (or time-space) connects with the translation of space into time within frames. The Bergsonian perspective,

by contrast, highlights the simultaneity of the entire comic, with all the panels co-existing in spatial proximity. Time is only introduced through the act of reading, in which a topology is established among the panels. The Bergsonian perspective's paradoxical dualism of simultaneity (the materiality, or 'thingness', of the comic) and process (the performance of reading, which unfolds in unidirectional time) is neatly captured by the final sequence on the second page:

> ***Grace:*** But a flame, even a touch, these are processes, not things.
> ***Kópen:*** But behind such processes there is a stillness; and in that quiet exist spatial relationships which transcend time.

Together Kópen's argument and the role of utopian distance in the story drive *Hicksville's* overarching theme of displacement and yearning, that which propels not only the narratives of comics but also our own quests, like the main characters of *Hicksville,* for return to our loved ones, our homes, ourselves.

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Gridlocking Joann Sfar's Talking Cat

by Michael Hill

Here, make yourself useful. Read it out!
The Talking Cat
Find me a monotheistic culture with normal animals whose names we know

The cat talks. Sfar, J. (2005) *The Rabbi's Cat* (New York: Pantheon Books, 58)

In a reference to the methodology employed by L'Atelier des Vosges and its publishing cooperative L'Association, David Hajdu examined the collaborative and experimental approach to making comics by a small group of artists that included David B., Christophe Blain, Émile Bravo, Marjane Satrapi and Joann Sfar:

> "We came, most of us, from fine art, from modern art, and we were trying to do comics," explains Sfar, whose children's book, *The Little Vampire Goes To School*, was a best-seller in the United States. "We were learning our job together-there was no master and pupil. We are still learning, and we try to play together. Sometimes, we have two people draw the same story at the same time, to see the difference. We play and experiment and, most of all, please ourselves" (Hajdu 2010: 280).

Joann Sfar has applied this creative approach to visual storytelling in a nonchalantly rigid manner in his graphic novel *The Rabbi's Cat*. The book is structured around three chapters of equal length, 46 pages, with each and every page layout arranged in a grid of three tiers of two panel rows-six equal panels per page (as can be seen in the illustrations), page after page throughout the entire book, a total of 828 same size panels![1] This page layout perfectly fits Ivan Brunetti's notion of the democratic grid:

> By "democratic," I am referring to a grid of panels that are all exactly the same size, from which we can infer their equal weight and value in the "grand scheme" of the page. We can also think of this type of grid as an "invisible template"; it does not call immediate attention to itself, but invites us to an unimpeded narrative flow, acting as a living "calendar" of events, sweeping or microscopic. The democratic grid need not be uninteresting or undistinguished; with a spirited approach, it can be the apotheosis of elegance, simplicity and sophistication (Brunetti 2007: 51).

The cat cares. Sfar, J. (2005) *The Rabbi's Cat* (New York: Pantheon Books, 46)

Whilst limiting the range of graphic expression it enables the reader to make rapid progress through the pages instead of arresting the flow of the story. The cat still moves freely from panel to panel and from page to page. Block by block the reader is provided passage and permitted to traverse the book for which the fixed grid design provides a reference point for the story of a cat that can talk. Sfar's gridlocking of his cat impounds it in his design system, it is dogboxed, bird-caged, henhoused, fishbowled, encased in a graphical sense.

1 An animated film version of *The Rabbi's Cat* has been released in France in July 2011. *Le Chat du Rabbin* is directed by Sfar and Antoine Delesvaux and has obtained the highest prize at the Annency animation film festival. Sfar directorial debut was *Gainsbourg, Vie Héroïque* (2010), a real-image biopic of French singer Serge Gainsbourg.

This holding pen allows him and his readers to pursue the story with alacrity and it's a very fast read indeed.

Writing about narrative techniques in comics Claude Moliterni cites the case of Burne Hogarth's 1947 *Tarzan* comic and his manipulation of a repetitive grid to enable his drawing to reach a desired level of expression. His page design consisted of:

> [...] three horizontal and three vertical strips. Over this grille, composed of nine equal rectangles, he ranged at ease, combining them in twos and threes, vertically, horizontally, or in four-block squares, thus obtaining a flexible, serene layout that accentuated his violently energetic style [...] (Moliterni 1968: 187).

Whilst being restrictive this layout offered a greater level of flexibility than that used by Sfar who does not deviate from his basic structure. Not surprisingly, due to the widespread disuse of rigid and repetitive page layout, alternative approaches to page design have been reflected in the research and writings of theorists such as Scott McCloud and Joseph Witek:

> Given the freedom to design page layouts from scratch in the comic-book format, most artists almost immediately preferred to modify regular grids by eliminating one or more vertical panel borders to form double or triple width panels, thus varying the visual effect without actually altering the basic dimensions of the basic building-block panels (Witek 2009: 153).

and:

> This small rectangular canvas we call *"the page"* has been the only venue for long-form comics throughout the century, and several generations of *artists* have devised thousands of *creative solutions* to the problems it presents... Seasoned artists know, for example, that it's desirable to place establishing shots at the beginning of a spread or page to create a sense of place in subsequent panels. They've also learned to tailor the last panel on the right-hand page to act as a tease for the next page (whether the story requires it or not) (McCloud 2000: 221).

Sfar does none of this and with the cat caught in his net, his cat's cradle, he stitches his characters and story together like a textile pattern. Confined as it is to the grid when the cat speaks and converses with the rabbi the reader is free to focus on its wit and charming personality. Fascination with the cat becomes a distinct possibility.

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Mel Calman on Oil

by James Baker

The late Mel Calman (1931-1994), co-founder of the Cartoon Art Trust, was honoured in 2006 when the relocated Cartoon Museum (London) named its temporary exhibition space 'The Calman Gallery'. Since this time 'his' walls have been graced by the works of William Hogarth, George Cruikshank, Pont (my personal favourite), Ralph Steadman, Steve Bell, and many more. Occasionally those walls even play host to a Calman.

It is odd how in a museum which celebrates the diversity of British cartoon art, these peculiar designs always appear incongruous to their surroundings – small, unfussy, and minimalist pockets of soft pencil sketchwork in a sea of colour and bombast. Yet this form was precisely the unpinning of Calman's brilliance – a mastery of understated satirical communication where the lightest of puns could open cavernous spaces for rhetoric and discourse.

Calman, M. (1981) "Untitled", in *The Times*, 8 October 1981 (University of Kent: British Cartoon Archive) © S & C Calman

Take for example the above design where Calman, in his distinctively minimalism style, imagines oil weeping from the television screen the very moment 'THE NEWS' flashes onto the screen. This transgression is not something to be marvelled at, and neither, as the glum disposition of Calman's ever-present everyman suggests, this it something to be celebrated. There are no hoots and huzzahs at having struck oil. Oil is instead a foreboding presence.

We can of course resist opening Pandora's box (or, perhaps more appropriately, Baldrick's Trousers) by reaching for an obvious reading – oil was on the news a lot in 1981. But the weary resignation of Calman's protagonist begs a question which forces the box open – why is he so resigned when faced with such a dark and looming substance?

This problem allows the reader to move freely between various meanings and contexts. For it is clear that for many commentators in the early 1980s, oil was associated with volatility, both as a commodity and as a substance. The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) oil embargo of October 1973 to March 1974 had exposed the delusion of cheap oil, and was followed by a further oil crisis in 1979 which effectively bookended a decade of energy concerns.

Few countries escaped without a story to tell. Not least Britain, whose political landscape, under the shadow of the three-day week and later Winter of Discontent, oscillated wildly between social-liberalism and neo-conservative protectionism in a few short years. Finally in 1981, when Calman penned this design, crude oil prices reached a peak of nearly 40 dollars per barrel, in excess of double what they were just two years previous.

So on one hand then the cartoon has an economic story to tell. Yet, as the recent furore surrounding Hurricane Katrina reminds us, narratives of oil and economics lead inexorably to considerations of the conflict between global capitalism and environmental legitimacy. 'Globalisation' was hardly a buzz-word of the early 1980, but the energy crises of the 1970s forced Europe and the United States to look outside of OPEC for sources of oil. Norway, Mexico and Nigeria become key foci of free-market expansion, causing in turn the oil glut of the 1980s.

In the case of Nigeria, where drilling had in fact begun in 1958, Shell and BP aggressively accelerated their pursuit of fresh oil reserves. This was conducted at a staggering environmental cost. Lax operation standards, particularly regarding corroded pipework, caused nearly 1.8 million barrels of oil spilt into the Gulf of Guinea between 1978 and 1981. Indeed 241 near shore spills in 1980 resulted in 600,000 barrels of oil polluting this coastline, damaging people's livelihoods and the ecosystems they depend upon for food and other resources[1].

Alongside this global narrative, Calman recalls more parochial concerns. In his design Britons are shown to be helpless as the growing pool of oil laps right up to our feet. This plays into the previous

1 Corporate obfuscation makes precision in these matters difficult to achieve. For an environmentalist perspective on the activities of western conglomerates in Nigeria see UP International 2010 and Nwilo and Badejo 2008.

point – showing that in 1981 the global face of oil was literally brought home via the medium of televisual news.

But this micro-narrative also functions as a reminder of a time when the environmental politics of oil were physically on Britons doorstep. On 18 March 1967 the supertanker Torrey Canyon struck rocks between the Scilly Isles and Cornwall. It was the first major commercial disaster of its kind, and Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson was widely criticised by commentators at first for his inertia, as exemplified by the Garland cartoon below.

Garland, N. (1967) *"Untitled"*, in *Daily Telegraph*, 20 Mar 1967 (University of Kent: British Cartoon Archive) © Telegraph Media Group Ltd.

Once Wilson did decide to act his efforts were quickly branded as calamitous. He steered an ill-fated military clean-up operation which sought initially to disperse and later to destroy the oil slick in English waters, but ultimately resulted in a toxic combination of oil and cleaning agents wrecking the Cornish coastline.

Indeed, as Patrick Barkham writes, the incident is still with us today as 'living proof that big oil spills plague ecosystems for decades. Forty-three years on, the crude from the Torrey Canyon is still killing wildlife on a daily basis'.

Calman's design touches on this cacophony of pessimism. But if his work is masterful for allowing us room to explore this multitude of perspectives, it is also masterful for allowing the reader a moment of levity while they do so. For all the darkness and provocation Calman's is not a hopeless

manifesto. Instead he asks the reader to extrapolate this comic scenario onto a realist setting, and ask themselves whether the relationship humans have fostered with oil is not equally absurd.

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The Batman Adventures: Rendering the Comic Page

by Nicolas Pillai

Puckett, K., Parobeck, M., Burchett, R. and Taylor, R. (1994) *The Batman Adventures* #16, 'The Killing Book' (New York: D.C. Comics, 10, 1)

In the early 1960s, a group of young British film scholars founded the journal *Movie*, challenging the prevalent assumption that Hollywood 'product' was inherently conservative and aesthetically bankrupt. Artistic achievement is not always a casualty of the culture industry, an axiom equally applicable to the medium of comics. In validating its worth to the academy, comics scholarship often privileges the experimental and the abstruse, works that challenge the formal limitations of the medium. This article is a small move in the other direction.

Licensed comics, those oft-derided afterthoughts in a film or television programme's marketing strategy, are rarely lauded or studied. A representative judgement on the sub-genre can be found in *The Rough Guide to Graphic Novels*, which describes the majority as 'relatively unremarkable and of little interest to anyone other than die-hard fanboys looking to fill the gaps between TV seasons with peripheral stories of their favourite screen characters' (Fingeroth 2008: 269). This may explain

why somebody would buy a licensed comic; it offers little insight into the creative decisions behind such artefacts.

The Batman Adventures is a rich and provocative licensed title, not despite but because of its form. Initially running 36 issues between 1992-1995, the comic was a tie-in to Warner Bros.' popular Saturday morning cartoon *Batman: the Animated Series*. I will not attempt to chart the complex iterations of the DC Animated Universe here – suffice it to say that *The Batman Adventures*' visual style and story material were closely aligned to the parent programme, so much so that the comic was rebranded *The Batman and Robin Adventures* for a second 1995-1997 run, reflecting onscreen alterations.

This need not be a negative – one of the great pleasures of the run lies in its expansion of the cartoon's world, deepening our understanding of central characters like Rupert Thorne, and peripheral ones, like Summer Gleeson. Accompanying this attention to the animated series' diegesis is a loving regard for the long history of the Batman character as the distillation of decades' worth of creators.

At the Animation Explosion 2011 conference, I argued that the success of both cartoon and tie-in comic lies in the confidence with which they address a wide audience. *The Batman Adventures*' letters pages attest to this, balanced between missives from the pre-pubescent and miniature essays from seasoned fans disenchanted with the contemporary *Knightfall* continuity. I am interested here in the sophistication of that address, using *'The Killing Book'* (#16) as an exemplar of the autonomy, and self-reflection, of this comic series.

One is struck immediately by the playfulness of this process. Consider the boldness of the issue's cover, illustrating not a scene from within the comic, but rather acting as a first panel, leading into page one. On the cover, Batman discovers a ticking bomb, with a message from the Joker; on page one, the bomb explodes. Typical of writer Kelley Puckett's wit is the pun on the term 'splash page', evoked as Batman hurtles toward a body of water. With characteristic humour and economy, 'The Killing Book' announces that the comic medium itself will be the subject of its story.

The Batman Adventures split each issue into three acts, evoking the television format of narrative interrupted by advert breaks. Puckett's act titles riff on popular culture; in 'The Killing Book' (a title that nods to Alan Moore), they are 'Seduction of the Innocent', 'How to Draw Comics: the Joker Way' and 'Comics and Sequential Death'. However, crucially, the sophistication of these references to comics culture do not hinder an understanding of the plot: they enrich it.

Indeed, the meta-textuality of the comic's story (in which the Joker kidnaps a comic penciller, so that he might detail his exploits) explicitly raises the question of creating for a wide range of readers. And in having the Joker communicate with Batman through a comic book, 'The Killing Book' acknowledges the multi-layered meaning permitted by the remit of the licensed comic.

Puckett, K., Parobeck, M., Burchett, R. and Taylor, R. (1994) *The Batman Adventures* #16, 'The Killing Book' (New York: D.C. Comics, 3, 3-4)

Admittedly, this winning parody of the creative process is at times incomprehensible to the casual reader. Firing the Gotham Adventures creative team, the editor Patterson (a caricature of *Batman Adventures* editor Scott Peterson, via Perry White) takes on young penciller Anthony Baldwin in their place.

Puckett, K., Parobeck, M., Burchett, R. and Taylor, R. (1994) *The Batman Adventures* #16, 'The Killing Book' (New York: D.C. Comics, 13)

"But I just draw! I can't write," protests Baldwin. Slapping his head, Patterson mutters to himself, "Write?! It's a comic book! Crazy kids..." In the letters page for a later issue (#20), Peterson reveals that the Gotham Adventures team represent penciller Mike Parobeck's approximation of the comic's creators.

However, even this in-joke offers a nice rebuttal to the idea that *The Batman Adventures* is 'just' a kid's comic. When the Joker kidnaps Baldwin, fresh pages are sent through to Patterson the editor who (naturally) is so morally bankrupt as to continue printing them. In parodying commerciality, 'The Killing Book' neatly elides it.

Page 13 represents the comic's most explicit *mise en abyme*. The page that we hold depicts Batman's point-of-view, rendering the act of reading a comic. On that page-within-a-page, the Joker challenges his intended audience (Batman) to read intently, that is, to decipher the Morse code message inscribed by the penciller (Baldwin).

But this rendering also performs a function for another audience (we, the readers), playing to a necessary convention (setting up the concluding battle between the Batman and Joker, in which the former prevails). The convention is commercially dictated – implied in the Joker's use of ad-speak ("Be there... or else") – but that does not make it inherently less valuable. We are not just looking at a rendering of a comic page; this is a page by Anthony Baldwin, who draws remarkably like Mike Parobeck.

At the story's end, Batman donates copies of 'The Killing Book' to Arkham Asylum as part of a "literacy campaign", amusing every inmate but the Joker. The action of the comic has becomea comic, one that aligns Batman with us as consumers. And while this takes place within the pages of a cartoon tie-in (or rather, because it does), 'The Killing Book' attests to the versatility of the comics medium. It recognises the potential for artistic excellence in even the most commercial of products, a testament to the worth of the licensed children's comic.

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Puckett, K., Parobeck, M., Burchett, R. and Taylor, R. (1994) *The Batman Adventures* #20, 'Smells Like Black Sunday' (New York: DC Comics)

Intimacies in Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*

by Janine Utell

Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* is often cited as an example of the particularly "literary" nature and potential of graphic narrative, for two reasons. First, it is itself hyperliterary and intertextual, drawing on and alluding to James Joyce, Marcel Proust, Albert Camus, as well as classic writers of lesbian and feminist literature like Colette, Kate Millett, and Radclyffe Hall. Second, it is not only a finely done memoir; it is, as Monica Pearl (2008) points out, a rare example of a coming-out narrative in "autography", to use Gillian Whitlock's term (2006).

The connection between the lesbian daughter and the closeted father Bruce (who probably committed suicide by getting himself hit by a Sunbeam bread truck) is the core of the book, with mother and two brothers serving as relatively minor characters. Yet for all the attention paid to the specifically queer nature of Bechdel's story and its radical intervention into graphic narrative (Pearl, 2008; Watson, 2008), as well as its standing as a memoir of coming out, readers have honed in–for the most part and rightfully so–on the relationship between Alison and her father (note: I'm following the convention of referring to Bechdel as the author and Alison as the character/narrator). On the other hand, the woman who initiates Alison into a romantic and erotic relationship, who also helps to reintegrate Alison into her own family after coming out, remains an underexamined minor character: Joan, the light-haired bespectacled college girlfriend.

The first time we see Joan, she appears in one of four panels in Chapter 2, "A Happy Death," depicting the immediate aftermath of the phone call to Alison informing her of the accident involving her father. Joan's face is obscured by Alison's head as she holds her, and is then revealed in the next, larger panel which depicts a scene slightly forward in time: Alison's arrival home for the funeral, Joan in tow to help. The narrative attached to the panel which shows Joan comforting Alison explains, "As I told my girlfriend what had happened, I cried quite genuinely for about two minutes" (Bechdel, 2006: 46). "Girlfriend" is used in its first instance here, leaving no doubt about the relationship and signifying an erotic life outside the family. A text box is superimposed over the image of the two women holding each other in grief: "That was all" (Bechdel, 2006: 46). The ambiguity of the text points to the intimacy of the relationship. It means that was all the crying Alison did over her father's death, but it also means that in that moment, Joan was all in all to Alison: she was all that was required.

An extended sequence with Joan next appears in Chapter 3, "That Old Catastrophe," which comes from the poem *"Sunday Morning"* by Wallace Stevens. "That Old Catastrophe" focuses on Alison's coming out, her mother Helen's initial negative reaction, flashbacks to the first years of the Bechdels' marriage, and the revelation by Helen to Alison of Bruce's homosexuality. The "old catastrophe" is the daughter playing out the tragedy of the father, in Helen's mind: a disastrous overturning then

unravelling. In order to illustrate the ways Joan makes visible the catastrophe, and then resolves it through her role as a conduit of both erotic and family intimacy, I have chosen the two panels that frame the episode in which Helen offers one of Bruce's books to Joan after he has died. In gratitude for Joan's help, Helen invites her to choose a book from Bruce's library; the younger woman selects a collection of poems by Wallace Stevens, then Helen reads the first section of "Sunday Morning" aloud.

The two pages immediately preceding the two I am focusing on show Alison and Joan naked and entwined in bed. They are reading, in addition to Adrienne Rich and Mary Daly, *The World of Pooh* and *James and the Giant Peach*. Shared reading forms a bond between them, especially the sexually and ideologically inflected reading practices where "in the harsh light of my dawning feminism, everything looked different" (Bechdel, 2006: 80-81). Robyn Warhol has highlighted the importance of embodiment for Bechdel, as depictions of the body stand in for what might be unnarratable (Warhol, 2011: 10): here, lesbian desire before it is incorporated into the narrative of the family. Images of legs and feet, drawn with graceful lines, are especially important in this series of panels. Maud Ellmann made the point in her recent keynote for the annual Modernist Studies Association conference that feet often signify debasement or the lower elements of the body in modernist literature and art; here it would seem to be quite the opposite, as feet are objects of beauty, signifying intimacy and private encounter.

In the first panel of the sequence I'm focusing on, the image of legs and feet is repeated: Alison is sitting at her father's desk in his library with her feet propped up and crossed at the ankles.

OVER THE YEARS, MY MOTHER HAS GIVEN AWAY OR SOLD MOST OF DAD'S LIBRARY.
JOAN, YOU'VE BEEN SO HELPFUL WITH EVERYTHING...
SHE BEGAN IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE FUNERAL, BESTOWING A BOOK ON JOAN.

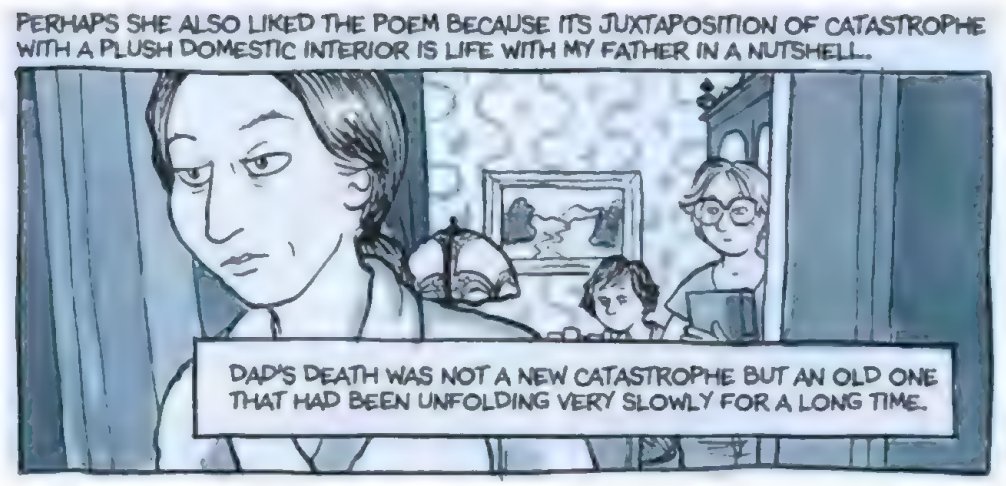
Bechdel, A. (2006) *Fun Home* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 82)

Her casual pose is at odds with the overdecorated study, and her body stakes a claim, one she could not have had while her father was alive. The image of her legs recalls a few moments prior: we have just seen the author-narrator naked in bed with her lover, and the prominence and sensuousness of

the legs draws us back into that intimate moment, as well as Alison's newly-found power. Joan and Alison's erotic intimacy is thus made visible in the family home.

Now, however, Alison's mother is present in their intimate space, altering it. The library becomes a site for women's intimacy, and Helen's gesturing towards Joan shifts the valance away from the erotic and toward the familial. In fact, it is Alison who is tucked away in the corner of the panel, in the lower left-hand corner, her face only slightly visible in profile. Her legs, joined with Joan's earlier, now create a line up from the corner towards Joan and Helen; the toes point slightly at Helen, making a bridge in the gap between the two other women. Joan and Helen look at each other, and are gazed upon by Alison, all three brought together. The "stuff" of the room–the cockatoo painting (a visual gesture towards Stevens' poem), the lamp on the right-hand side of the panel subsumed by Alison's narrative text box the same way Helen's will begins to subsume "that old catastrophe" of Bruce's plot–serves to heighten the sense of enclosure, encircling the women.

Just as reading together brought Joan and Alison closer, so does poetry here facilitate the intimacy generated by bringing Joan into the family. Yet Bechdel only gives the first stanza of "Sunday Morning." The second includes the line: "Why should she give her bounty to the dead?". Perhaps the answer is implicit in the second panel under consideration: Helen is now free to give her bounty elsewhere.


PERHAPS SHE ALSO LIKED THE POEM BECAUSE ITS JUXTAPOSITION OF CATASTROPHE WITH A PLUSH DOMESTIC INTERIOR IS LIFE WITH MY FATHER IN A NUTSHELL.
DAD'S DEATH WAS NOT A NEW CATASTROPHE BUT AN OLD ONE THAT HAD BEEN UNFOLDING VERY SLOWLY FOR A LONG TIME.

Bechdel, A. (2006) *Fun Home* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 83)

Alison-narrator's comment on the panel highlights the "juxtaposition of catastrophe with a plush domestic interior": Helen's face is resigned and determined as she leaves the overstuffed study. Joan and Alison-character are framed by the doorway, separated from Helen as she heads off-stage; they look slightly cartoonish next to the older woman. The women's eyes no longer meet, the younger women now watching as the older departs; they themselves seem separate from each other. Helen's

catastrophe is foregrounded, as her face is foregrounded in the panel, and the girls' erotic relationship, and any family difficulty it might have caused, is relegated to background.

However, Joan is part of the room Helen is leaving, and she has been brought into the Bechdels' world. Helen gives her bounty not to the dead, but to Joan in the form of the book, a gift that prompts Joan to write her own poem about the experience. It is the crafting of a text that can be part of the mosaic of Fun Home, a filling in of another piece through words and careful reading, that permits Joan a share in the intimacies of the family and its members.

NOTE: Thank you to my colleagues at the 2011 Project Narrative Summer Institute for introducing me to Fun Home, and for good ideas about minor characters; and thank you to Daniel Robinson for technical assistance.

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The dog at the door in "There Will Come Soft Rains"

by Nicolas Labarre

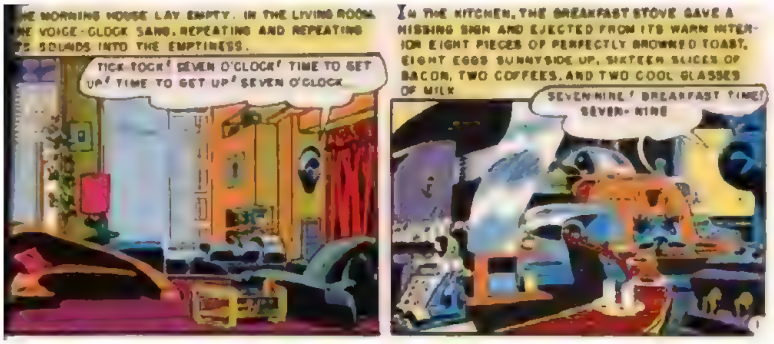
Feldstein A. and Wood, W (1953) "There Will Come Soft Rains", *Weird Fantasy* #17 (E.C. Comics, 3)

There Will Come Soft Rains is EC Comics' 1953 adaptation of the eponymous Ray Bradbury short story, the penultimate text in *The Martian Chronicles*, in which an automated house continues to function after the atomic apocalypse that killed its owners.

Scripted by Al Feldstein, the adaptation is faithful to Bradbury's story, preserving most of its text in Feldstein's characteristically numerous captions. While EC's writer and editor is responsible for some noteworthy alterations to Bradbury's story – which reinforce the notion of the automated house as a quasi-human protagonist [1] – the adaptation is mostly known for Wallace Wood's illustration. In

1 Each device has a separate voice in Bradbury's text, not in EC's version; similarly, a passage in the original describing the house as an "altar" for absent "gods" is omitted.

this case, the adaptation process truly becomes an extension of a text that is mostly unaltered. While Bradbury's story is about conflicting notion of times, Wood uses the ambiguity of the representation of time in comics to further complexify this thematic.


THE MORNING HOUSE LAY EMPTY. IN THE LIVING ROOM THE VOICE-CLOCK SANG, REPEATING AND REPEATING ITS SOUNDS INTO THE EMPTINESS.
TICK-TOCK! SEVEN O'CLOCK! TIME TO GET UP! TIME TO GET UP! SEVEN O'CLOCK
IN THE KITCHEN, THE BREAKFAST STOVE GAVE A HISSING SIGH AND EJECTED FROM ITS WARM INTERIOR EIGHT PIECES OF PERFECTLY BROWNED TOAST, EIGHT EGGS SUNNYSIDE UP, SIXTEEN SLICES OF BACON, TWO COFFEES, AND TWO COOL GLASSES OF MILK
SEVEN-NINE! BREAKFAST TIME! SEVEN-NINE

Feldstein A., Wood, W. (1953) "There Will Come Soft Rains", *Weird Fantasy* #17 (E.C. Comics, 1, strip 2)

As early as the first page of the story, partitions between panels become analogous to physical partitions between the rooms of the house while also retaining part of their classical chronological function. Because there are no protagonists, Wood cannot use action-to-action transition, the dominant articulation between panels in mainstream American comics, unless one accepts the laconic utterances coming out of the speakers as proper actions. Thus, the first part of the story consists almost entirely of scene-to-scene transitions, but these jumps which McCloud describes as showing "things happening in a concise, efficient way" (McCloud, 1993: 76) are here meant to show things not happening. Over the first two pages of the story, dissociation occurs between the text, which emphasizes a rigid chronology, and pictures that deliberately fail to construct a sequence. Pictures here play the role of descriptions, but because they need not be fitted in the linear structure of prose, they stand freely, removed from the flow of the novel. The rituals of automated daily lives are revealed to be illusory movements, which do not set the pictures and the diegetic space into motion, in the words of Bradbury critic Jonathan Eller: "[the story] is about the deconstruction of our chronological sense of time, which has now become meaningless" (Eller: 2004, 154)

The third page of the adaptation, however, brings about a sequence, as the family's dog enters the house. At this point, action-to-action transitions are restored, as the dog – a proper protagonist – wanders through the house then dies of hunger and sickness. The dog is absent, however, from the central panel. Instead, it is shown, sniffing at the door (panel four), then frothing at the mouth (panel six) while looking in both cases at that unattainable fifth panel, which depicts the automatic kitchen. At first glance, this is but an example of the tabular use of the page: panel four and five depict contiguous spaces within the diegetic world, and the lieu of the panels on the page mimics

this spatial disposition. However, in the general economy of the story, this tension between space and time takes a special significance.

The presence of the dog restores the possibility of a sequence for a while, where the passage of the time is unambiguous in each panel-to-panel transition, but the interruption of this sequence coincides with the discovery that the dog will not be able to survive. The use of the past continuous in the caption ("The stove was making lunch") was present in the text to indicate simultaneity, against the linearity imposed by prose. By inserting a pause between these simultaneous moments, the time necessary to read the picture below the caption, the panel border again works against the ostensible chronology of the text. Conventional signs ossify into tangible barriers within the narrative, the panel border, the walls of the house and the system of comics all reveal their carceral nature. The house is shown as an uninhabitable space.

This tension between space and time within the narrative echoes the visual contrast between the lovable curves of the furniture and appliances within the house on the one hand, and the walls and panel borders on the other. Through these mutually complementing devices, Wood manages to express the allure and the ultimate unlivability of the modernist dream house, within Bradbury's tale was about the contradictions between conventional time – the cyclical time of ritual – and historical time[2] – with the apocalypse and the eventual destruction of the house.

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2 This could and should be read as an expression of the then prevalent schizophrenic vision of the future, which conflated an overly optimistic vision of the domestic sphere with the promise of impeding global destruction.

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Gaston Lagaffe: The Archivist as Architect

by Renata Pascoal

Left: Franquin, A. (1979) *Lagaffe: Mérite des baffes* (Marcinelle: Editions Dupuis, 6, 5-9) Lower right corner: Representation of Opus Quadratum [Image annotated by author]

Gaston Lagaffe, the character created by Franquin, appeared for the first time in *Le Journal de Spirou* in February, 1957 (Miller, 2007: 20), and became well known for two traits: his laziness and his creative yet inefficient solutions when trying to solve a problem.

Gaston Lagaffe's diegetic space is the headquarters of his real-life publisher, *Le Journal de Spirou*, and one of his occasional challenges is his incompetence at organising the office archive. However, in the book *Lagaffe: mérite des baffes*, Gaston finds an unexpected solution for this task: he uses an architectural logic; but it proves to be a new gaffe from Lagaffe.

In the image above, Gaston builds a wall of books. Each volume (or group of volumes, depending on their thickness) corresponds to one of the blocks that composes the *opus quadratum*, a type of roman wall construction technique consisting in parallelepiped or cubic stones set in horizontal courses without the need of mortar to bind them together because of their great weight (Adkins, 2004: 166-167).

Gaston made an opening on the wall that allows him to speak with Prunelle, his immediate superior at *Le Journal de Spirou*. In comics, architecture do not have the cost and structural concerns that architecture has in real life, so what the author only needs to support the forces from the top of

the opening is to draw a clapboard, which works as a lintel supported by the two columns of books that frame the window.

Franquin, A. (1979) *Lagaffe: Mérite des baffes* (Marcinelle: Editions Dupuis, 41)

In the page above (41 in the album), the solution is slightly different. The opening in the wall is in the form of a Roman-style arch, with thick books used in the place of voussoirs, the wedge-shaped stones that conform the semi-circle of the arch, which in Roman architecture was built according to the radius of an ideal circumference (Tarella, 1994: 18). The comic element, here, appears when these images of classic architecture are inserted in such a different context.

Gaston has placed a thicker book to stand as the keystone that balances all the construction and supports the force of discharge. The usual humor of the series is evidenced when Prunelle asks Lagaffe to hand him the thickest book. Gaston tells him that the book is unavailable, knowing that his whole construction would collapse if he satisfies his request.

Another remarkable feature of this construction is that the support of the arch are tubes. But why did not Gaston use a column of books for the abutment like in the previous example? In Roman architecture, blocks were set one against the other and stayed in position by their own weight or by

linking them with metal strings that made the construction more resistant to the forces of discharge (Malacrino, 2010: 166). As tubes are entire pieces, they allow a better adjustment to lateral forces. In this page, Franquin emphasises Gaston's difficulties in balancing the arch's structure with the only help of his strength and flexibility, where Romans used wooden frames as an aid for the assembly of the voussoirs until the keystone was inserted (Malacrino, 2010: 132).

In Jacques Martin's *Le Dieu sauvage* (1970) from the *Alix* series, the city of Apolonia is shown in its construction process, with all the instruments used for that purpose. In the images below, inside the red circle, we can see one of the wood frames that were employed for building arcs; whereas in the case of *Gaston Lagaffe*, he is the wood frame himself: a personification of his stupidity (Franquin, 1979: 41)

Left: Representation of a wood frame used to sustain the voussoirs until the insertion of the keystone. Center: Martin, J. (1970) *Les Aventures d'Alix: Le Dieu Sauvage* (Tournai: Casterman, 6, 5-7) Right: Franquin, A. (1979) *Lagaffe: Mérite des baffes* (Marcinelle: Editions Dupuis, 41, 6) [Image annotated by author]

The differences in architectural representation between *Alix* and *Gaston Lagaffe* have to do with the genres they belong to, and of course, to the time setting, which requires from their authors different amounts of research work. Since *Alix* is set in ancient Rome and its aim is pedagogical, it needs a bigger rigor in architectural representation which *Gaston Lagaffe* does not need.

Arcs began to be correctly and extensively used during II b.C. instead of the trilithic Greek system (from the Greek: *Tri* - three, *lithos* - stone), enabling the creation of large covered spaces and new architectonic typologies such as aqueducts and bridges (Tarella, 1994: 12-19). The usage of passages from comics like these can be an aid in teaching, stimulating the ability to criticise and summarise, becoming an alternative to descriptive books without visual examples.

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Deadenders: Comics as Virtual Text

by Jesse Prevoo

Wolfgang Iser argued that literary texts receive their meaning through construction of a 'virtual text': the reader fills the gaps in the original text based on her/his own experience thus creating an infinite number of possible texts and meanings. Based on the text, every reader constructs her/his own version, which makes the reader responsible for the signification of the text. Unless the text is regarded as a highly codified whole, an encrypted message if you will, the reader should work with the elements the text gives in order to construct a possible reading.

This "interaction between text and reader" (Iser 1980) plays a significant role in reading comics. Scott McCloud terms the process 'closure' in the way Marshall McLuhan defined it: the process through which we complete images by relating them to what we know. We can recognize a logo, even if we can only see part of it, because we can fill in the missing parts, just as we can fill the gaps and ellipses in a literary text. Comics, however, works slightly differently from the literary text.

While reader participation is required in every graphic narrative, the following excerpt from *Deadenders: Stealing the Sun* (figures 1 and 2) is a clear example. It incorporates several streams of information from different sources to form the narrative. It shows different independent elements simultaneously that need to be combined in order to create the narrative. The three panels in figure 1 show a chase that moves from the backstreets of a city to a busy road.

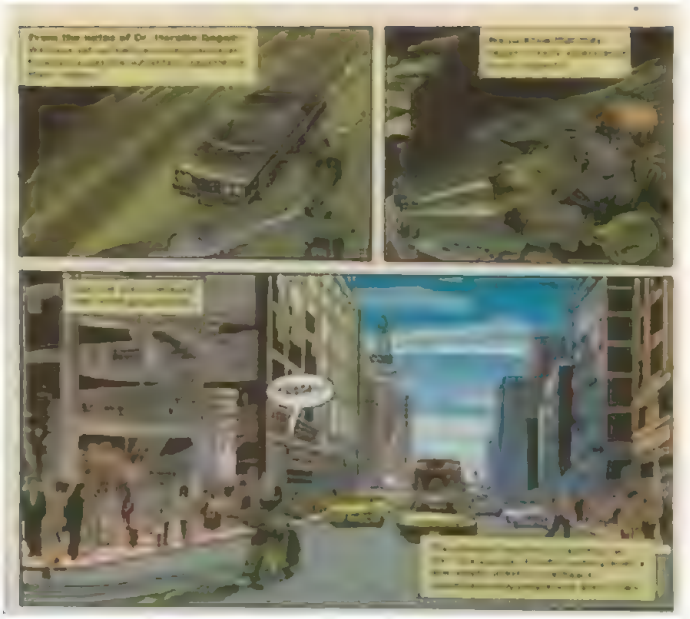

Figure 1: Brubaker, E. & Pleece, W. (2000) *Deadenders: Stealing the Sun* (New York: Vertigo, 23,1-3)

Figure 2: Brubaker, E. & Pleece, W. (2000) *Deadenders: Stealing the Sun* (New York: Vertigo, 23, 4-6)

Taking into account the context of the chase – the story is set in New Bethlehem (or New Bedlam) some time after the world was hit by 'the Cataclysm' – the appearance of the (brightly coloured) busy road is strange. It introduces a new environment into the narrative, an environment that does not belong there, nor is in keeping with its surroundings.

Panels 1 and 2 show the post-Cataclysmic world, dominated by brown colors. Panel three shows a very different world, full of life, with a clear sky. Beezer (riding the scooter) is clearly taken by surprise, hence the swearing. The transition between panels 1 and 2 is what McCloud calls an 'action-to-action transition', "featuring a single subject in distinct action-to-action progressions" (McCloud 1993, 70). Both panels are part of the same event, namely a chase.

The transition to the third panel is different. The landscape changes dramatically, streets filling up and the sky suddenly blue. The exclamation by Beezer shows this is not normal. Therefore, although it is a part of the chase-sequence, and the transition between panels 2 and 3 is an action-to-action transition, it requires more than just connecting the dots, as in panels 1 and 2. Focalization of the story has shifted from the (visual) narrator to Beezer, who suddenly is confronted with an image of the city as he has never seen before. Panel 3 has to be a subjective view, attributed to Beezer, because in panels 5 and 6 (figure 2) the world returns to normal.

There is an aspect-to-aspect transition between panels 3 and 4, as we move from an establishing-shot to a close-up of two cars, a detail of panel 3. This close-up offers an explanation for panel 5 in which Beezer is falling: he tries to swerve away from the cars but loses control of his scooter. Jasper drives into the scene in panel 6 constituting another action-to-action transition. But then again it could be an aspect-to-aspect transition; a transition that "bypasses time for the most part and sets a

wandering eye on different aspects of a place, idea or mood" (McCloud 1993, 72). This would mean that panels 5 and 6 take place at the same time.

This transition marks a return to narrator-focalization since it shows the world 'as it is'. We can conclude that Jasper has seen how Beezer turned the corner and tried to avoid hitting the cars. But Jasper did not see the blue sky, the busy streets and the cars Beezer was about to hit. For him, it must have looked like Beezer just lost control of his scooter.

There is even more information on the page. Embedded in the panels are caption boxes, one with the entry "From the notes of Dr. Horatio Gagon". In these caption-boxes Dr. Gagon recaps what is known about the "visions" some of his research subjects experience. He states that they grow in intensity, starting as faint whispers and resulting in full hallucinations and flashbacks to a time that no longer exists. His description helps us make more sense of figure 1: Beezer seems to be one of those people who has these 'visions'. I should add that this is not indicated on the page – it merely is the most logical explanation of the representation of the events, based on the information that is given.

The connections between the different panels are created by the reader in order to construct a sequence in which the images make sense. Determining the type of transition, which is normally done without conscious thought, is a way of signifying the images. It is a way of filling in the blanks, just as Iser proposes, thus endowing the text with meaning by creating a 'virtual text', in which the sequence is completed by the reader.

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Miller and Varley's *DK2*: Supersimulacra

by Pepo Pérez

Perhaps the most disturbing scene in *Batman: The Dark Knight Strikes Again* (also known as *DK2*; Miller and Varley 2001-2002) is where Batman attacks the corporate leaders of the United States government, giving the word "terrorism" a new meaning. The Anarcho-terrorist superhero's assault is directed against "the real monsters" (page 53, panel 1), the corrupt powers-that-be that rule behind a virtual president:

Miller, F. and Varley, L. (2002) *The Dark Knight Strikes Again* #2 (New York: DC Comics, 53)

The transgression of the conventional superhero structure is significant here: *DK2* introduces an inversion of roles that develops the one Miller outlined in the denouement of *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986) when Batman fights Superman, who works as a government agent. In most comics of

this genre, the superhero would defend the status quo while the supervillain would make criminal plans to provoke the hero's attempts to reestablish the disturbed social order.

Ken Parille stated insightfully:

> superhero comics should really be called supervillain comics: evil orchestrates the chaos and excitement that dominates eighty percent of every issue. The supervillain is the hero's raison d'être. Without him, the hero's just a jerk in a silly costume. (Parille 2002)

In *DK2*, those roles are interchanged. It is the protagonist superhero, Batman, who openly attacks the establishment, a puppet government in hands of corporate powers, inciting the masses to rebel against this simulacrum of democracy. The rupture of the conventional plot structure of the superhero genre is echoed by a number of formal disruptions reflecting the transformations produced by electronic media and the Internet (Emmons 2005).

When the panels assume the function of a screen, they do not only have the shape of a television screen as in the case of the first *Dark Knight*, they sometimes assume the shape of mobile phone screens, laptop screens or chat-room windows:

Left: Miller, F. and Varley, L. (2001) *The Dark Knight Strikes Again #1* (New York: DC Comics, 58)
Right: Miller, F. and Varley, L. (2002) *The Dark Knight Strikes Again* #2 (New York: DC Comics, 3)

The characters in *DK2* eventually become digital functions, as if the authors were responding to media simulacra with their own "supersimulacra" in the form of panels crowded with superheroes. Although they are referring to our world, *DK2*'s images shape a closed world that only "exists" inside the panels, a world inhabited by characters that are simulacra themselves, "inhuman pixelated shadows" (García 2007: 39) without psychology. Psychology is also absent from the old DC Silver-Age superheroes of the sixties that Miller admired and drew his inspiration from. Miller's characters are mere artifacts, functions and signs at the service of that satirical supersimulacrum called *DK2*. As Marshall McLuhan stated,

> the effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without resistance. The serious artist is the only person able to encounter technology with impunity, just because he is an expert aware of the changes in sense perception.
> (1964: 33)

Technology is so present in *DK2* that this work could be read as an "epic about the digitalization of the hero" (García, 2007: 38) that is an epic about the digitalization of the common man. It's not so much *DK2*'s content, but its disruptive formal features that capture the changes the technological advances of the late 20th century have produced in our perception of the world. This formal features take the idea of surface as meaning to its final consequences.

The impression produced by the formal disruptions in *DK2* (fragmentation of images, heavy pixelization of the computerized color, excessive caricaturization of the characters, etc.) is that we are living in a digital hyper-reality that engulfs all human relations, including the economy. As we know Jameson exposed the connections between culture and financial capitalism in a moment when the spectres of capital, wandering out of their production geography and circulating more freely than ever, compete in a "vast world-wide disembodied phantasmagoria" (1998: 142).

In this world-wide network, electronic transferences of capital entail the abolition of time and space, and money achieves its definitive dematerialization in a globalized cyberspace "as messages which pass instantaneously from one nodal point to another across the former globe, the former material world" (Jameson 1998: 154). Our economic reality is proof that aggressions against other countries are not military anymore –at least not in the "developed" world– but channeled through speculative "attacks" to the sovereign debt, as they are specifically called in the economic jargon of the media.

In "late capitalism", the virtual transactions of financial speculators determine the entire economy of countries, the "democratic" political system of their governments and, of course, the real life of their citizens. We should ask ourselves if the world we inhabit now is so different from the virtual

United States ruled by the computer-generated president Miller imagined. As Baudrillard showed us, the "map", or the simulacrum, precedes the "territory", and shapes it (1994: 1).

—

English translation by Roberto Bartual.

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Branca de Neve: Pregnant Moments

by Tiago Canário

The process of page layout design and its composition became important in the study of comics narrative following the publication of Fresnault-Deruelle's *"Du linéaire au tabulaire"* (1976). With the consolidation of the structural perspective in this field—and the influences of semiotics / semiology—in 70s and 80s, the panel has been considered for its contribution to the emotional dimension of the sequence. Later, panels were pointed out by Thierry Groensteen as key-moments (1999), minimum elements of composition, filled with details that cannot be separated in the understanding of what is represented.

Thus the relationship between the images and their position on pages would be a major mechanism in the production of narrative sense – relationships investigated by authors such as Groensteen (and his arthrology concept), Scott McCloud (and his six transitions, part of the concept of closure) and Benoît Peeters (with the investigation of the tensions between narrative and page).

Coutinho, R. (2007) "Branca de Neve" *Irmãos Grimm em quadrinhos* (Rio de Janeiro: Desiderata, 90, 1-12)

Such perspective is considered in two pages of "Branca de Neve" ("Snow White"), created by the Brazilian cartoonist Rafael Coutinho and found in *Irmãos Grimm em quadrinhos* (2007). Different from many interpretations of the girl hated by her stepmother, sentenced to death and sheltered in the forest story, Coutinho explores panels and their tensions by bringing a refreshing rhythm to the fable, closer to the rawness of Grimms' work.

In the 11 pages that compose the narrative, Coutinho shows the same page layout, using 12 panels (into three columns and four rows), imposing strength and impact on his narrative despite homogenization of the frames. Instead of building a tabular structure, he explores narrative from the articulation between panels, by using passages and ellipsis.

Taking account of the influence of tensions between the panels on the reading experience, some authors have pointed out the use of "pregnant instants" (Aumont, 2004, Lessing cited in Wolk, 2007). If narrative is produced from images, the choice of some

moments of action is essential to represent the decomposed event. The pregnant moment encompasses a variety of events or actions seemingly happening at the same time. It allows the reader to see a set of moments (a complex action) in only one panel. This single moment in time suggests the climax of the story (or the sequence) and makes it more comprehensible in its complexity. The most significant moments are those "pregnant instants" with a clearer ability to suggest the action.

Returning to Gotthold Lessing, Douglas Wolk points out that "a single image in static visual art is most dramatic when it's the moment from which time radiates in both directions, suggesting what's happened before it and what's about to happen after it" (2007, p. 131). And it seems to be on the pregnant property that Coutinho develops his fable, dynamizing it.

As it can be seen, the reader finds only the essential in each frame. There is almost always only one motif in each moment. The reader finds only frontal frames, as apparent (and conventional) shots/countershots, but working as large narrative ellipses. Tensioned side by side, the panels' focus on different characters would be considered like a dialogue, as the characters face each other – which does not happen in this work. Somehow, Coutinho's proposition behaves as an action/reaction chain, not a discursive chain.

In the first panel line there are three leaps from the stepmother's decision ("no-one") to the suffering of the (still) Queen to the loss felt by her daughter. No matter which plan, its execution or its commotion – except for the baby's pain, which sums up the grieving, even if it only lasts a just single panel. Each panel focuses on the characters' expressions (queen, stepmother, princess or dog) or on a singular object (tombstone, mirror). The story is linked by the jumps in the main narrative. Five panels are enough for the stepmother to become queen.

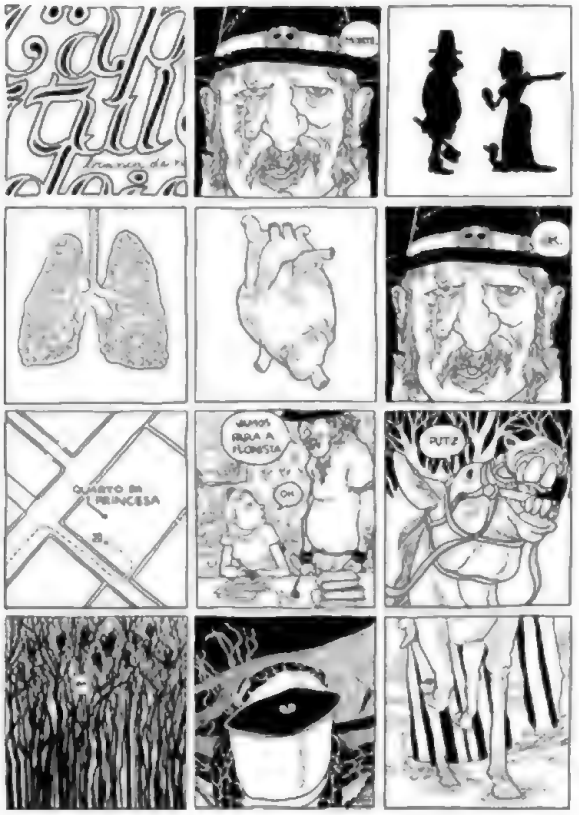
In that shots/countershots chain of actions each sequence seems to be summed up in only one pregnant moment, excluding all the others. Coutinho constructs sequences by combining pictures that represents different (and whole) sequences. He seems to articulate and interpose moments filled with a lot of other moments as if each panel was an avatar of a distinct sequence. Therefore it is irrelevant with whom the characters dialogue or the situations belong, as much as the environments where they are.

No matter the plan, it works, as, four panels are enough to narrate the death of the Queen. The decision and the plan of the (future) stepmother are abridged in her dry expression and the single "no-one" word, while for its execution, the Queen's painful expression is enough. The before or after moments are ignored and the pregnant moments are sufficient for the readers to understand.

From small flashes of each character, the sequence works to assume a galloping pace in which every detail becomes excess. Similarly, Coutinho avoids romanticizing the sequences and dramatic moments. In the queen's death, the child's pain and crying expression is sufficient. The tombstone acts as an endpoint for the first queen, which lies beneath the earth and the rain, alone, with no more cries or complaints. The story is sequenced in dry and objective moments by calling for a game of

expressions between characters, and sometimes, the use of colour, exploring the tensions between the light and dark background of some panels.

There is also a laconic use of written text. The textual information is present in a synthetic kind – as "pregnant texts", like the pictures. The balloons and captions range from keywords, interjections and onomatopoeia, to the dry, objective and straightforward. In the example below (p. 3, beginning of Chapter 2), textual information is focused on "death" (panel 2), "princess bedroom" (panel 7) and "let's go to the forest" (panel 8) and in the others (panels 6, 9 and 10), only on interjections.



Coutinho, R. (2007) "Branca de Neve". *Irmãos Grimm em quadrinhos* (Rio de Janeiro: Desiderata, 91, 1–12)

This text is as pregnant as the pictures. Among small flashes that make up the narrative, the conduct of the story line is done by large cuts. However, despite the similar use, the narrative construction reveals itself anchored in the visual discourse. The author gives to the verbal structure an adjuvant function, so the interpretation is possible even without knowledge of the textual information.

In a sense, Coutinho recreates the work returning its status to the Grimms', to the allegorical narrative that rejects even the "once was", dry, non-romanticised treatment.

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The Repetition of *Haruhi Suzumiya*

by Jonathan Evans

The *Haruhi Suzumiya* series tells the story of Haruhi Suzumiya, an ordinary high school girl who just happens to have god-like powers. The series combines elements of hard sci-fi with a high school setting. It began as light novels written by Nagaru Tanigawa and illustrated by Noizo Ito and has been adapted into comics by Gaku Tsugano, into a TV series by Kyoto Animation, a film, *The Disappearance of Haruhi Suzumiya* (2010), and video games.

For a fan of the series, the experience of this multimedia textual network can be one of repetition, or rather, as Linda Hutcheon remarks of adaptation in general, 'repetition with variation' (2006: 4). A fan will read or watch or play each iteration of the narrative, sometimes in more than one language: as Laurie Cubbison notes of fans of Japanese animation, before a title appears in the US market, they may already have experience of it in Japanese imports, fan/amateur subtitled versions or comics (2005: 53). The repetition is never perfect, as each medium has its own capacities and limitations, forcing the adapter to recreate the text in a medium-specific form.

I want to argue here that the story 'Endless Eight' (Tanigawa 2011: 3-56; Tsugano 2010: 1-68) offers a performance of the fan experience of a multimedia series, exploring multiple possibilities in its own narrative in a similar way to how fans experience the different possibilities in adaptations.

'Endless Eight' tells the story of Haruhi and the SOS Brigade's summer vacation, which sees them go to the public pool, work part time jobs, go to a Bon festival, catch cicadas, etc. Kyon, the narrator, begins to experience déjà vu, before finding out that he and the other characters have been experiencing the same two week period, with variations, for 15,498 cycles (Tanigawa 2011: 37). Haruhi Suzumiya is causing a time-loop as she feels something is missing from their summer (36). Kyon eventually breaks the loop by saying that he needs to finish his homework (51), identifying the one thing Haruhi cannot think of to complete her summer.

The comic tells a slightly different version of the story: here Mikuru Asahina is too ill to come to the Bon festival, and many of the other elements appear in a different sequence to the prose version, caused by splitting the text into two meaningful chapters, so that the revelation of the cyclical summer comes five pages from the end of the first chapter (Tsugano 2010: 31). This maintains suspense in a way that was not necessary in the prose story.

The discussion of the nature of the loops takes place in a flashback in the second chapter (pages (40-45)).

THERE HAVE BEEN A NUMBER OF VARIATIONS IN HARUHI SUZUMIYA'S ACTIONS DURING PAST SEQUENCES
THAT IS NOT NECESSARILY THE CASE
AT THIS POINT, THE PUBLIC POOL HAS YET TO BE OMITTED, BUT THERE HAVE BEEN A NUMBER OF VARIATIONS IN THE ACTIVITIES THERE. THERE WERE 6,360 INSTANCES OF PLAYING WITH A BEACH BALL, 8,640 INSTANCES OF RACING, 5,640 INSTANCES OF HARUHI SUZUMIYA USING THE CRAWL DURING THE RACE...
OVER THE COURSE OF 16,400 LOOPS, THERE WERE TWO SEQUENCES WITHOUT A TRIP TO THE FESTIVAL AND THERE WERE 437 INSTANCES WHERE THE TRIP OCCURRED WITHOUT GOLDFISH SCOOPING
THAT'S ENOUGH

Tsugano, G. (2010) *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya*, vol. 5 (New York: Yen Press, 41). Text reads from right to left

The sequence is framed in black, separating it from the main story and highlighting its significance. The character designs are taken from Ito's illustrations in the light novels (e.g. Tanigawa 2011: 24, 31, 44) in order to better link together the multiple iterations of the text.

The later discussion of the time loops suggests an alternative sequencing of events, where the discussion takes place in a different form. The marking of the discussion as a flashback disrupts the narrative flow of the story, which had been, up to this point, chronological. It therefore offers a possibility that the story could play out differently, just as Nagato remarks in the text (Tsugano 2010: 40-41) that the loops are not all the same.

The animated version extends this performance of multiple possibilities. While the two printed forms are quite short, the animated form is eight episodes of the second series. Each episode plays out the same plot, with variation in the character's dress, *mise en scene*, etc. The sequence drew

criticism from reviewers (e.g. Ross n.d.) for being repetitive. It did not please fans either, leading to the director offering a public apology (Tolentino 2009).

While it may not have been popular, the sequence does demonstrate the fan experience. Having already read the prose and comic versions of the story, a fan would come to the animated version knowing already what will happen in the narrative. The fan approaches the text looking for differences and developments in the telling of the story. 'Endless Eight' offers this experience within its diegetic world as well as its multiple iterations across media.

The experience of repetition in adaptation and 'Endless Eight' is not, as Freud (2006: 141-142) would have it, one of control, but rather a spiralling out of control, away from any one definitive version of events or text. The fan experience of the story, crossing several media (and languages), is always contaminated by the other possibilities in the other media. It offers a way of exploring the multiple possibilities of the story, just as Haruhi Suzumiya does (unconsciously) in 'Endless Eight'. As Henri Bergson noted, repetition 'calls the attention ... to a new detail which had passed unperceived' (1988: 111). Fans are looking for this new detail: adaptation across media allows them to find it again and again in the multiple iterations of the tale.

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Georgian Projections of French Revolutionary Madness

by James Baker

During the 1790s London's graphic artists used madness as a tool (among many) with which to explain away the purported rationality of the French revolutionary agenda (Porter, 'Reason, Madness, and the French Revolution', 1991)[1]. By erecting counter-spectacles which confirmed Edmund Burke's reading of the French Revolution as a false-sublime[2], these designs allowed ideological engagement to be efficiently sidestepped in favour of exaggerated and ridiculous expressions of displeasure[3].

Gillray, J. *Petit souper, a la Parisienne; -or- a family of sans-culotts refreshing, after the fatigues of the day* (20 September 1792, Hannah Humphrey) BM 8122 250 x 352 © The Trustees of the British Museum

1 Porter's essay offers a classic account of revolutionary madness.

2 An argument central to his Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790).

3 Steve Poole has recently argued that extreme and unrealistic caricature is more politically ambiguous than the overt ambiguity generally attributed to the designs of James Gillray. He argues that these former images we so ridiculous that they were mostly likely to have courted ridicule of those propagating reactionary counter-revolutionary rhetoric. See Poole 2011.

It was James Gillray (1756-1815) who engraved the classic image of revolutionary madness. Indeed his gruesome *Une petit Souper a la Parisienne or A Family of Sans Culotts refreshing after the fatigues of the day* was still being printed into the 1830s. Here French revolutionaries, male and female, young and old, gorge upon human limbs, organs and entrails. They degrade humanity and property alike by using them for seating and warmth. They preach liberty and equality as a barbarous creed.

Madness of course was embedded in Georgian visual culture. Popular classics such as Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* depicted the madness of consumerism in *Vanity Fair*; Gulliver's encounters with Laputian scientific mania in Book III of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* were well known; and Shakespeare's construction of madness in Hamlet and through the weird sisters in Macbeth played across the nation. Yet these traditions never reached the level of cannibalistic mania Gillray explores. Rather cannibalism was a novelty 'discovered' by Captain Cook during his first South Sea Voyage (from 1768 to 1771) if only described as socially dangerous by the third edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica (1788-1797).

Cruikshank, I. *A republican beau. A picture of Paris for 1794* (10 March 1794, S. W. Fores) BM 8435 303 x 198 © The Trustees of the British Museum

Cruikshank, I. *A republican belle. A picture of Paris for 1794* (10 March 1794, S. W. Fores) BM 8436 289 x 196 © The Trustees of the British Museum

This same edition also described cannibalism as a disease peculiar to feminine physiology. Thus while Isaac Cruikshank's *A Republican Beau* [BM 8435, 10 March 1794] indulges in infanticidal and cannibalistic tendencies (see the infant foot marked "for stew"), it is his partner, *A Republican Belle* [BM 8436, 10 March 1794], who represents a more striking exploration of cannibalistic madness. She stands, her clothes ragged and torn, her shoes worn through, as Liberty – indeed she is not dissimilar to the statue bequeathed by the French to New York City in 1886.

Despite her appearance, she walks proudly, baring her gruesome animalistic teeth and worn features. Unlike her male counterpart, she carries the symbol of the Terror around her neck and as an earring. She wears three daggers as a crest, en aigrette, the band of her makeshift crown inscribed 'War War Eternal War'. And she holds a dagger in her left hand whilst with her other she carelessly fires a pistol at a passing man.

Madness is thus personified in the Belle in a multitude of ways. First, in an aesthetic sense, she is a barbarous but calm murderer, who has replaced the cross with the chop. Second, in a metaphorical sense, she exemplifies the perversion of power caused by the revolution. She strolls the streets, openly parading her politicisation and her power over men – her latest homicidal act a direct affront to accepted notions of patriarchy. And third, in an allegorical sense, she is Liberty (ironically here the

anti-thesis of Britannia), the ruler of a society built around her which, if we look to the background of the image, delights in playing boules with skulls, leaving their dead to openly rot, and using images of regicidal decapitation to demarcate places of pleasure.

In short, much like the revolution which made her, she cannibalises reason, structure and morality.

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Art and Illusion in Blutch's *Mitchum*

by Nicolas Labarre

Blutch (2005) *Mitchum* #3 (Paris: Cornelius) (no pagination)

Blutch is one of the most influential French cartoonists to have emerged from the 1990's renewal in *bande dessinée*. His work has been published both in the popular *Fluide Glacial* and by avant-garde publishers such as Cornelius or l'Association and he received the grand prize at the Angoulême festival in 2010. Mitchum is a series of five experimental comix in black and white, published between 1996 and 1999, featuring no unifying themes or characters, beyond an emphasis on improvisation, dance and body language. The character of Robert Mitchum himself only appears in one of the issues, as a perverted icon, depicted at the different stages of his life.

In the passage above, from *Mitchum* #3 (not numbered), the transient and nameless heroin is followed in the subway by the police after a nightmarish sequence, an opportunity for Blutch to

display the playful use of comics' conventions and graphical possibilities. The first noticeable feature of this page is its use of a regular six-panel grid, focusing the attention entirely on the composition and content of the panels themselves. The page is also silent, and depicts a left to right movement, so conventional as to pose no interpretative difficulty in itself. It is not uncommon for comic creators to neutralise some of the possibilities of the medium to provoke a shift of emphasis, but Blutch pushes this process to a stage where this simplification becomes prominent, becoming the subject of the page rather than a facilitating device.

The fixed frame, the lack of colour and sound effects (with the exception of a small "zzzz" in panel 5), as well as the stark shadows immediately call to mind German expressionist films, from *Dr. Caligari* to *M*[1]. A reader familiar with the reference will therefore expect shadows and shadow plays to be decorative and expressive rather than mimetic[2]. Blutch then proceeds to alternately confirm and undermine these expectations.

Depending on one's perception of the page as a whole and on one's familiarity with German expressionism, the black background of the first panel acquires different significations, the most simple being a metonymy for a dark place or a nocturnal environment. This default reading is sustained by the second panel, in which this black area expands as a recognizable, albeit conventional, shadow on a wall. However, the shadows on the trousers' legs suggest that this is actually a well-lit environment, with the source of light located above the character.

The third panel further complicates a potential naturalistic interpretation of the initial black background by providing an abstract and arbitrary division between black and white. At this stage, the division between black and white cannot be assigned to a mere distinction between light and shadow, but instead suggests a plurality of meaning, ranging from the naturalistic to the purely decorative. Long brushstrokes on the subway track even suggest a possible tonal reading of the black areas.

Having thus eroded the possibility for a mimetic reading, Blutch invalidates it entirely in the fourth and fifth panel. An ad hoc lightning allows for the projection of a menacing shadow on the white space of the background, thus implicitly positing it as a wall. In the next panel, however, the brushstrokes take a different signification, as they reconstruct a Barkian conventional symbol – cloud and speed lines. This is also the panel where the onomatopoeia "zzzz" can be found.

These symbolic devices are of course simply conventions, perceived as such all the more easily since they are absent from the rest of the page. The white space in this panel functions as nothing

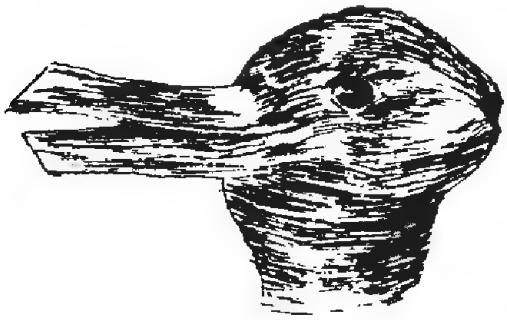
1 While film noir has often been linked stylistically to German expressionism, a connection reinforced here by the presence of Mitchum, most films described as belonging to the genre (itself a problematic category) actually make use of a flat lighting, with only occasional use of expressive shadows (projected crosses, window blinds as virtual bars on the wall, etc.). Even formally sophisticated noir movies such as Kubrick's *The Killing* (1956) could hardly be described as expressionistic.

2 In the previous sequence, a policeman dresses up as "Mechagodzilla" to burst open a closed door. This and the very title of the comix serve to prime a reading of the series in terms of cinema conventions.

more than an empty space on the page, integrated in the diegetic space solely through the delineating function of the panel border–"separative" and "structuring" functions, in Groensteen's terms (43-9).

The character's continuous movement in the last three panels, as she turns her head to look behind her, suggests a continuity of action within a coherent diegetic space, but Blutch's shift from one conventional set of representation to another over the course of these three panels makes it impossible to reconstruct that hypothetical space. Blutch's juxtaposition of these conventions negates them in turn, even in the case of the more ostensibly "realistic" space of the second and sixth panels.

In his introduction to Art and Illusion, Gombrich uses the well-known rabbit-duck figure to explore the nature of painterly illusion. He notes that while it is easy to see either the rabbit or the duck, and indeed possible to shift rapidly from one to the other, it is impossible to see them both at once. For Gombrich, the example illustrates the potency of illusion: the figure makes us aware of the illusion but does not allow us "to watch ourselves having an illusion" (4-5).



The duck-rabbit illusion (attributed to J. Astrow)

With less didactic intent, Blutch also uses a juxtaposition of two irreconcilable images virtually juxtaposed by the reader as she reconstitutes the narrative sequence, to bring the illusion to fore. The difference between Gombrich's experiment and Blutch's sequence is the inscription of the latter into a linear structure, which invites the reader not to a back-and-forth between two illusions, but to a forward movement, from one illusion to the next, then to the next again. Gombrich invites us to an analysis, while Blutch invites us to experience these sudden and jarring shifts in conventions.

Ann Miller (2007) mentions Blutch's strategy of integrating elements from other bandes dessinées and explains how in doing so he is "disturbing the fictional illusion of the originals as well as that of his text" (144), but this intertextual practice permeates Blutch's work regardless of the presence of an identifiable "original".

The morphing of the shadow into a conventional symbol between the fourth and fifth panels calls our attention to the opacity of signifiers in comics, to the materiality of the ink on paper and to the reader's willing participation in the construction of meaning through an educated separation between symbolic and diegetic signs. The juxtaposition here makes this separation problematic and

even meaningless. In the context of a simple narrative sequence, the page comes to be read as a meditation on the fluid meanings of ink on paper, itself echoing the supple brushstrokes and improvised narratives that characterize *Mitchum* as a whole.

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Moving between worlds: *The Arrival*

by Christophe Dony

In comics, a 'crossover' usually refers to the mixing of different fictional worlds and characters within a single narrative. The trend has enjoyed considerable popularity in superhero texts, often engaging various titles or story arcs in an epic-like narrative.

The combination of various persona and settings in crossovers inevitably complicates spatio-temporal relations, sometimes raising questions of dis/continuity. Interestingly, the problematising of space and time inherent to the idea of 'crossing over' also finds resonance outside the realm of these fantasy and escapist storylines, particularly in comics engaging with postcolonial notions such as dislocation, transnationalism, and cross-cultural encounters.

Shaun Tan's silent graphic narrative *The Arrival* (2006) provides a relevant example of this latter category. In many ways, it functions as a 'crossover text,' by which I mean a malleable form that is able, to varying degrees, to engage with spatio-temporal fragmentation, dis/connection, and dis/continuity.

The book can be located in the tradition of migrant narratives, travel writing, and diasporic fiction. *The Arrival* indeed reflects on the notion of belonging and comments on the effects and consequences of exile. It portrays the sea voyage of a father leaving his country and family for an unidentified Promised Land. After having crossed an unknown ocean, the protagonist arrives in a nameless country and finds better prospects for his family thanks to other migrants who welcome and help him. In the process, however, he experiences the distress of departure, bewilderment, and an overwhelming confusion in relation to space and time.

More specifically, *The Arrival* develops a whole vocabulary of spatial and temporal displacement which does not aim at containing or defining migrant subjectivity, but rather conveys manifold migratory histories and pasts that articulate cultures in transition and transnationalism.

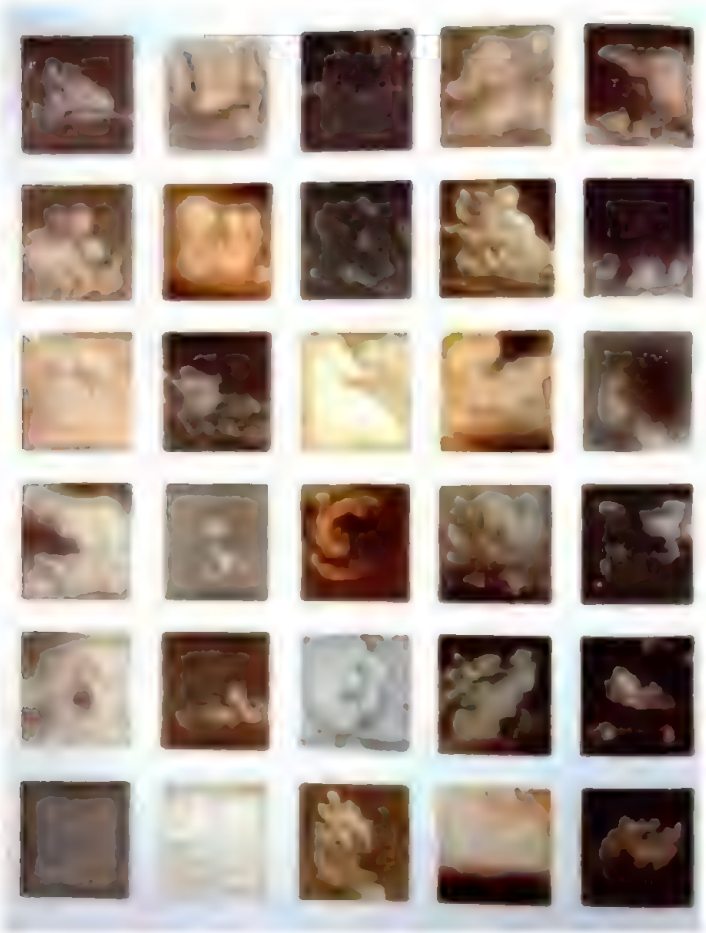
One of the strategies specific to comics that Tan employs to convey this problematising of space and time is that of 'braiding'. 'Braiding' is one instance of what Thierry Groensteen labels 'general arthrology.' In *The System of Comics* (2009), Groensteen opposes 'restrictive arthrology' to 'general arthrology.' He suggests that while the first concept is concerned with the relations between panels and their narrative interactions on the page, the second focuses on the meanings that can emerge from relations between panels at a distance. 'Braiding' is one example of general arthrology which, via the repetition of a specific panel arrangement, for example, connects narrative moments at a distance to reference a previous scene, sentiment, or atmosphere.

In *The Arrival*, one instance of braiding works towards a polyphonic understanding of diasporic fiction and conveys a chorus of migrants' memories. This braiding engages with references to other

migrants' histories, pasts, and (re)locations, and therefore evokes the spatio-temporal fragmentation inherent to the 'crossover.'

This is visible in the episode where the protagonist, after having embarked on the ship that will bring him to the new land, looks at the clouds from the deck of the vessel. Graphically, this lingering gaze at the sky is represented on a double splash page which contains equivalent panels in size and shape depicting various types of clouds. This very specific layout is reproduced nowhere else in the book but on the cover-flaps in which portraits of migrants from different ethnicities and times are depicted in a similar way and format.

Interestingly, Tan explains in *Sketches from a Nameless Land* (2010) – a sequel companion book to *The Arrival* – that the migrants' portraits galleries on the cover flaps of *The Arrival* are directly inspired from actual photographs of migrants from the Ellis Island archives. In addition to using archival photographs, Tan also included a reworking of his father's passport picture on the cover-flaps. In so doing, the author affirms the importance of the personal and the familial into the collective. He brings different histories into relief, proposes different kinds of narratives, mixes the personal with the historical, and intersperses his (post)memory with that of other people.



Clouds: Tan, S. (2006) *The Arrival* (Melbourne: Lothian Books) (no pagination)

Portraits: Tan, S. (2006) *The Arrival* (Melbourne: Lothian Books) (no pagination)

The consequences of this visual crossover are manifold. First, it thematically and historically connects the protagonist's journey with that of other migrants from former times and as such establishes a disruption of place and time. A switch of focalization also corroborates this link between the protagonist's story and the fate of the various migrants depicted in the cover flaps.

Whereas before this episode, Tan made use of external focalisation (that is, the character was enclosed in the panels), the images of the clouds are represented without characters in the frames. This switch of perspective thus suggests that the clouds may reference the protagonist's gaze, or that of any other migrant portrayed in the cover flaps. This ambiguity, once again, reasserts the importance of plurality that permeates throughout *The Arrival* as it mixes the personal and the collective.

Secondly, the braid attests to the mobility of migrants and diasporic subjects, their fluid identities, and their ability to call into question the myth of harmonization generally associated with globalization. Their movements from the margins of the book to the center of the narrative obviously challenge the binary conception center/periphery long held in Western discourses. In fact, the mobility of migrants and the multiplicity of voices that the braid articulates work towards a conception of the global which is multi-faceted and plural rather than monolithic and universal. The fragmented

layout of these pages corroborates this claim, suggesting that a whole (the page, the global) can only be thought of in terms of its various parts or fragments (panels, localities).

Finally, the braid also compels the reader to cross over between the pages of the book and therefore to literally move in time and space, a condition that is not only characteristic of an increasingly deterritorialized world, but also of 'crossover' comics.

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Pluto: Robots and Aesthetic Experience

by Peter Wilkins

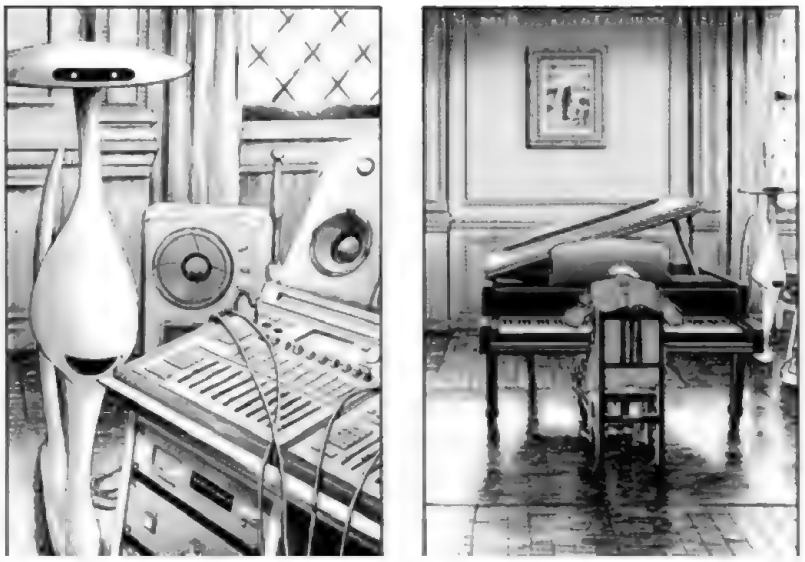
Craig Fischer's recent article in *The Comics Journal*, "Pluto and Doubling", drew me to Naoki Urasawa's *Pluto* (2009), a reconfiguration of Osamu Tezuka's "Greatest Robot on Earth" story arc. Fischer notes that Urasawa "subverts the typical science-fiction stereotype of robot-human interaction" because the robots explore feelings while the human characters exhibit more instrumental thinking. In *Pluto*, robots yearn for aesthetic experience, provoking us to meditate on the human relationship to the sensory experiences of pain and pleasure, the beautiful and the sublime.

As examples of purpose-built technology, the robots also require us to meditate on the ironic relationship between aesthetic capacity and instrumental reason: the machines of war keep insisting on the importance or art, beauty, and feeling in general. Simply put, the robots' aesthetic desire critiques instrumentality in the service of war in favour of a more humane, if not perhaps more human, response to the world. Consequently, *Pluto* demonstrates a connection between aesthetic judgment and practical reason, between what is beautiful and what is good or right.

The early North No. 2 episodes confound the distinction between instrumentality and aesthetics in the sphere of music. North No. 2 is essentially a weapon with artificial intelligence who wants to learn to play the piano. After the 39th Central Asian Conflict, he fortuitously gets a job as butler to a composer, Paul Duncan. Duncan immediately rejects North No. 2's desire, reacting as if his touching the piano were instrumental miscegenation: "Stop, North! That piano's not designed to be touched by a weapon of mass destruction!!" (2009: 109, 6).

Consistently in these episodes, Duncan's words evoke a racist response to the threat of the other.# Racism depends upon definitions of the human being: a Jewish or black person is outside the racist's definition, just as North No. 2 is outside Duncan's. Belonging to "humanity" is a guarantee of ethical treatment; being inhuman means that one can be used and abused. Further, it means that whatever one produces cannot be art: "No! Your kind can't make music!!" (2009: 116, 5) Duncan is insistent on the distinction. He believes he knows the difference between "data" and "true feelings," mere imitation and authentic music.

Duncan has a Romantic view of art: what matters is the expression of the artist's mind, not the imitation of things in the world. This view emphasizes ephemeral genius over concrete *technê*. While electronic musical equipment fills Duncan's house, he eschews it for an old-fashioned piano, stressing his "organic" relationship to his craft. As Duncan plays the piano, the electronic instruments "look on," seemingly disappointed by their neglect:



Urasawa, N. (2009) *Pluto* (99, 5 and 6)

When North No. 2 asks about the equipment, Duncan responds "High-tech equipment can masquerade as the real thing, but they're just a bunch of machines..." (2009: 101, 4). Duncan clearly perceives the piano as more "authentic" than the synthesizer, a perception that raises questions about the distinction between machines that imitate and instruments that produce authentic music. Duncan never answers those questions, but we can suppose that his logic depends on motivational and operational causality: the music in his mind moves through his hands to the piano in a comprehensible fashion. Duncan's repeated banging his hand or fist on the piano, a motif of these episodes, emphasizes this causality, as if the piano were a tool, like a hammer:

Urasawa, N. (2009) *Pluto* (99, 2)

But Duncan's violence towards his instrument–at one point he is on the verge of taking an axe to it–emphasizes his failure to make his tool produce what is in his head. He cannot fill in a particular

blank in a song. The causal chain is not working for him. This breakdown illuminates the problem for expressionist theories of art: how does the work of music that emerges as notes from the piano reflect the artist's inner genius? What is inside the black box of the mind that emerges as music? And what explains the blockage of that genius?

In the end, these questions defy answers: all we have are the results produced by some form of technê , whether it be piano or synthesizer. Whatever we can say about the distinction between piano and synthesizer also applies to the distinction between human and robot, as Duncan suggests in equating his electronic instruments with North No. 2. The robot imitates the human being like the synthesizer imitates the piano but in a way that challenges the authenticity of the thing it is imitating.

We might argue that the most human of affects is psychological trauma, the way the mind responds to such things as shock, war, and accidents. In the world of Pluto it is taboo for robots to kill humans but not to destroy other robots in the field of battle. Urasawa imagines North No. 2's wartime experience as an instrument of destruction conjoined with a highly developed A.I. as sufficiently traumatic as to produce art. Duncan repeatedly asks North No. 2 how many robots he killed in the war, and North No. 2 finally admits: "Tens of thousands of my own kind... and every one of those killings is played back again and again in my artificial brain" (2009: 145, 8). When Urasawa draws North No. 2 playing the piano images of the violent destruction of machinery accompany him:

Urasawa, N. (2009) *Pluto* (129, 4, 5, and 6)

We cannot tell from the panels whether his music is evoking these moments or working through them as catharsis. We merely see the juxtaposition of North No. 2's hands on the piano, musical notes,

and cascading disembodied mechanical parts. The violence of the background is set against the delicate image of the robot playing the piano, which in turn contrasts Duncan's persistent smashing of the instrument with his fist. Furthermore, the idea of an artificial intelligence working through mechanical body parts on an "organic" instrument confounds the causality that links the "mind" of the genius to the music that emerges from the piano. The cascading machinery may just be the explosion of that causality.

What matters in Pluto is not so much fidelity and authenticity in expression but a kind of "art-work," analogous to Freud's "dream-work," that testifies to the intensity of experience by revising it and transforming it. While we may scoff at the notion of war machines with artificial intelligence producing art, we only have to look at the history of the human capacity for war, and perhaps the poems of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon to give the idea a second thought.

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Contributors

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Roberto Bartual is a scholar, translator, writer and *cineaste maudit*. Spent a certain amount of his life in L.A. doing the only two things you can do in L.A. (smoke weed and hate films), so he decided to devote his life to comics: they are cheaper to make and usually better than movies. He likes to use French words once in a while and... you know, you can never trust people who use French words once in a while. A founding member and co-editor of *The Comics Grid*, he's got a PhD from Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, in Graphic Narration and European Literature. He is currently based in Spain.

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Brad Brooks is a graphic designer, cartoonist and writer based on the South Coast of England. He has worked in and around comics for many years, including being the UK correspondent for *The Comics Journal*, co-founding the bilingual collective/publishing house Les Cartoonistes Dangereux, and co-writing (with Tim Pilcher) & designing two books on comics. Married with two daughters, he loathes writing biographies, but loves Arsenal FC and Apple computers.

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Tiago Canário is a journalist studying an MA in Communication and Contemporary Culture at Universidade Federal da Bahia, Brazil. His research focuses on the nouvelle manga movement, considering the relationships between the structure of manga and nouvelle vague's narrative, also discussing the construction of authorship in comics.

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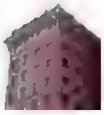

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Dr. Kathleen Dunley's scholarship focuses on the cultural legitimacy of comics, reception studies, and comic art history. Additionally, she has designed courses on the Graphic Novel and Comic Art History. Dr. Dunley is presently the Faculty Chair of English, Reading, and Creative Writing at Rio Salado College in Tempe, Arizona.

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Creator and former Director of the Master of Animation course at the University of Technology, Sydney, Dr Michael Hill has loved comics ever since his mother gave him Donald Duck to read as a child. He has a Master's degree in animation and a PhD in comics, prompting his introduction on ABC Radio as "Doctor Comics". A member of the Editorial Board of the *International Journal of Comic Art* and the Advisory Committee of the Q-Collection Comic Book Preservation Project, he has lectured on animation and comics and worked as a consultant to educational institutions. Having donated his collection of research materials of Australian alternative comics, the Michael Hill Collection of Australian Comics to the National Library of Australia, he is now concentrating on artistic projects and the creation of an autobiographical comic titled *Blotting Paper*.

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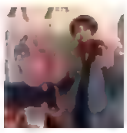
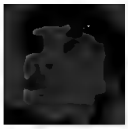


Nicolas Pillai

Nicolas Pillai obtained his PhD from the Department of Film and Television Studies at the University of Warwick. He is interested in adaptation, seriality, jazz, crime fiction, comics and cult television.



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